

I'M FINE

MICHAEL JUSTIN MOYNIHAN

,	$\frac{1}{8}$ rest
;	$\frac{1}{4}$ rest
.	$\frac{1}{2}$ rest
¶	Whole rest
-	Grace note
()	Crescendo/ decrescendo (according to phrasing)
:	Another tool for phrasing
!	staccato
<i>Italics</i>	Implies loaded words
Bold	mf/f
CAPS	ff
(?) (!)	In lieu of programming a question mark combined with a comma

Drawing: the mill town

1

What is this urge that suddenly wakes inside one's heart? It comes over a person so unexpected, filling our minds to burst or overflow before we know what it is, before we have a chance to consider if it is practical or makes any sense at all. It is born from the dreams of childhood wonder. It is lived in the courage and persistence of – of anyone inspired enough, determined enough, possessed by that muse: an explorer, a knight, a princess, a child, a weak old man, a dog, a mouse, the living and the dead. This adventurous spirit awoke inside me today, right after my wife left me, I lost my job and apartment. That feeling inexplicably awoke in me, so I will listen; I will follow.

How to choose proper companions

Every adventure is different. Each one has its own sets of particulars, those “who, what, where, when, why and how’s.” To answer the question “who?”: some adventures must be traveled alone, others with close friends, others with family, and others still with those who seem absolutely strange to you (often friends and family fill this role as well). On this trip I will travel with people I've known for years. But even amongst those who are familiar there are considerations to take into account:

Avoid sour-pusses, worry-warts, complainers and excuse makers. It is best to travel with companions who have that same initial impulse as you. Typically if they are also filled with the adventurous spirit, their want to be doing what they are doing will be enough to preclude them from the titles: "sour-puss" and "complainer".

Though you may be able to convince someone to go who has not already been infected with this sense of adventurous wonder, be warned if you drag them along sober, uninfected by this muse, they will likely resent you and further more become a stick-in-the-mud. A participant who is not happily participating can ruin a trip for everyone. You might suggest now with your rationalizing and circling "reason" that he/she would eventually become inspired, or some fantastic event may take place that would have made it all worthwhile for him/her. While this is of course possible, it is better not to pressure your friends; instead, consider leaving an open-invitation, or open windows that reveal the feeling you are so overcome by, and if that feeling overcomes them as well, well good. And if not, when you leave they may have some regrets, but perhaps a better suited adventure for their personal needs will come while you are gone. As we all know, it

is not for you to decide what path is best for them.

As far as "worry-warts" and "excuse makers" are concerned, you will have to pre-determine your companion status by smaller explorations or by day-to-day experiences. Observe how candidates cope with unfamiliar situations, to surprise company, initial failure, minor injury, and to germs. If the words "could never", "will never", or "impossible" are common to their vocabulary then you should be suspicious of an excuse maker, worry wart, or general destroyer of potential and magick (spelled with a 'k'). If they fixate on the negatives of a situation, and give you grief for your own past "failed" efforts, be wary. These people can be wonderful friends and surely dear to you, but they can easily be stumbling blocks to the *success* of an adventure – success being defined as enjoyment, overcoming great hardships and challenges, navigating and surviving dangers, learning and growing from the experiences had, and the willing and/or non-consensual exposure to fantastic, magickal (spelled with a 'k'), and beautiful things.

To enhance these notions of *success*, selective planning can come into play. For example, we will wear clothing representing the skins and heads of our *power animals* so that we are *recognized* in the wilderness, and to aid us

when calling upon their guidance and strength in our travels. Furthermore, we will look great in these outfits, and that will nurture the cosmic giggle in our thoughts and conversations.

Don't travel with psychotic or deranged friends: especially on a remote or dangerous expedition. There is no sense in creating more dangers or potential situations for friends to turn on friends, or for friends to turn into fiends.

Remember last summer when we rowed Nate's antique canoe to the stone island and broke several ribs against the surrounding rocks? Brandon immediately turned savage and tried to eat Jimmy. It took three of us to pull him off Jimmy's leg, and seven to tie him up. A few of us fixed the boat, while Tom tried to talk to Brandon. He wouldn't stop barking or biting at us so we knocked him out to calm things down – to ease the tension. Once we were back in the water and off the island, he was absolutely normal. He even removed the tourniquet on Jimmy's leg and applied a pressure dressing instead, correcting our wound care choice on the way to the hospital.

Brandon is the perfect example of someone not to bring on an adventure, but for some reason he convinced me to come along. It's not that I have any reason to believe he won't repeat his horrific display, but there is some

intuitive voice very clearly telling me he should come. Perhaps his strength of almost seven men will come in handy, perhaps it will destroy us all. Never the less, contrary to my own rules and advice, Brandon is coming along.

A note of discretion: learning to listen to *Intuitive Knowledge* is a complicated undertaking. Maybe not "complicated," but specific. I happen to have a bias towards that sort of learning. I think children do as well. I have to admit that the clarity by which I understand "intuition" could be better – often muddled by my own desires or by general short lived dogmatic philosophies (in weaker moments, exhausted, I look in vain for one answer to everything). Never the less it is my primary tool for important decision making and for choosing life direction. It is cousin to that very Urge for Adventure that I've been going on about. My warning is this, when learning to follow your "heart" or "gut", do so with high moral considerations and be wary that you are not following your self-serving or "others hurting" wants and desires. Be accountable! There are mystery schools and trans-personal practices that teach how to see *universal truth* – this is a safer road than the one I follow, with no guide but the Universe itself, and the blind faith that I will be able to follow without much distraction or misdirection from myself.

Packing

There are advantages traveling with a larger number of people. Our "team" will consist of seven, simply because I had six friends that really wanted to go, and seven is a holy number to boot. With a group this large it will be easy to carry doubles of everything important and still travel light.

For the purpose of this trip, none of that will really matter because we have decided to bring almost nothing at all.

My pack, inventory:

pocket knife (1)
handkerchief (1 floral)
nail (1 galvanized)
arrowhead (1)
a foraging guidebook (1/2 of *Northern Forests*)
bear mace (1 can)
tinderbox (1 w/ flints)
food (1 week supply)
journal (1 w/ 2 pens)

An Amish poet suggested I carry the first four items on my person at all times. The reasons are self-explanatory.

Day One

The first day out is always interesting. Everyone's energy is soaring, but there is plenty

of rust to shake off in the legs. You get to slowly watch as civilization transforms into wilderness; slower still is the transformation within ourselves from civil to wild.

We left early. I doubt anyone slept much last night. We were a good two hours into it before the sun showed her face. Trailing off behind us: our small town, the scattered houses, the farms. Keeping a solid pace we found ourselves at the forest's edge by noon. I suppose it was there that Donald felt something turn inside him.

He found a snapping turtle turned on her back in the middle of the road. He found a strong stick and offered it to the turtle's beak. She bit and held on as Donald carried her to an adjacent stream. Donald stayed for lunch, then said his farewells and headed west, towards the caves. He also lost his job this week – the company we worked for closed. Many people lost work. Oddly enough, he has also lost his wife, a month earlier, to death. We both thought this adventure would be the perfect *escape*.

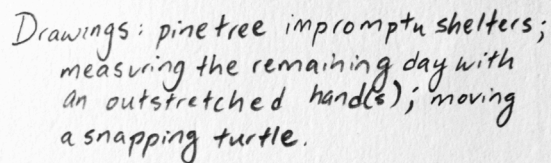
I have to consider these words. I misspoke; the adventurous urge is not the same as the need for escape. They often happen close to one another or the need to escape may trigger the urge to travel, but they are separate and distinct. The fundamental difference is that escape alone will only take you so far – once

faced with a challenge a need to escape will not give you the positive motivation to press forward, it will only make you want to escape again. Once you *do* escape and you find yourself in the silence of the wilderness... well, your own mind will fill that silence quickly and the issues you need to overcome within yourself will spring and loom double the size as before, walking forward within yourself is the only option other than forever running. Many turn homeward, and surround themselves in noise and busy things to keep their heads confused. Donald wants clarity. In the caves there is only the sound of his own head.

We packed up and pressed on, into the forest. Lord how sad we've become after so little time away from the woods. Stop listening for an ax murderer creeping from behind the trees(!) perhaps that beast does exist but he's within you! That gnomish ghoul will come on his own. For now listen instead to the rustling leaves of your own feet and your good companions, the trickling stream just out of sight, and the chattering of birds and squirrels. We stopped with the sun two hand widths above the horizon, giving us plenty of time to collect firewood and choose a campground that provides shelter in case of an unexpected rain. We laid out close to a number of bushy white pines, with low laying branches full of needles, given room to grow by a

clearing in the canopy (good for the fire – to prevent a spread of our flames). If it were to rain we could easily take cover beneath one of these sappy mammoths, cut and stack other branches over the main horizontal (still attached to the trunk) in a sort of leaning 'A' shaped evergreen tent.

The night is crisp and clear. Of course, more stars than any of us can ever remember having existed. Vast. It makes you feel lost, every time, you are nothing beneath it, swallowed by it. Afraid now? We are only beginning our journey into *exposure*. There are things far more terrible than a pine needle bed beneath a beautiful night sky. Listen with your hearts old men as the wilderness sings you this nocturne; listen you, your hearts on your sleeves; ease graciously into his voice; rest these out of shape bags of bone and those minds that have settled for the mundane and too few; in the morning we will wake a day closer to a child's brilliance and wonder; and a day further into living as men should.



Drawings: pine tree impromptu shelters;
measuring the remaining day with
an outstretched hand(s); moving
a snapping turtle.

2

Day 7 Reassessing

Forgive that cavalier tone with which I wrote about the ease of building an evergreen shelter. For show it is as simple as it seems, but in meaningful practice, as an unexpected summer storm drops buckets on your sleeping face – water proofing is no easy task. Yesterday was spent drying out. I'm afraid of what winter will bring. We better master these skills before then, otherwise... well we'll die. It is odd to admit, that death would come so easy, and that we have chosen to expose ourselves in this way. Even before this week in the woods, in our "civilized lives" we chose a reality. There were the skills and patience and time needed to master to navigate there. And here now. I'd like to fare better than I had these last thirty years. I'd like to fare better than surviving. Master survival first I suppose, then there is dreaming, then there are other *things*. I can't imagine what *they* are; just something different from retail therapy, superiority striving, resume building, celebrity recognition, or the accumulation and exploitation of monetary wealth. But for now, there seems to be this barrier to entry: the changing of expectations.

I am glad that I have my friends. Without that comfort, this endeavor would be a suffering that I am not sure I could endure. With company, misery can be laughed at. In solitude, perhaps I would learn something else; the lessons of a magician, like the shaman Merlin, Parsival, and Jesus. But I am content to experience solitude in my mind, and in my days retain the embrace of a comrade; be it the masculine form: a punch or wrestling to the ground, the shared labor of breaking logs for firewood.

It has been nearly a week since we departed. I haven't written, nor have I thought to write. Every day is full. Either with the steady and weary march of sore legs, or the fumbling with wood and leaves to keep dry and warm.

I woke today by the gentle shaking of my feet; Brandon was crouched over me with a finger pressed to my lips and another to his own, mirroring. This would be startling to most, but I've awoken to far more absurd, frightening-fare than this considering the years I have known Brandon, and boarding school (let's not revisit those memories).

It wasn't really morning. The sun hadn't broken the horizon; "first light" would be a stretch. I went to whisper some question but Brandon just pressed my lips harder and

gestured with eyes to the finger pressing against his own lips. Making myself very still his glare vanished; he motioned with those eyes away from camp, up the hill towards our cook-site. On tiptoes he left our sleeping companions; I followed mimicking, to keep the beast tame. On the hill I discovered what he woke me for. Our food was scattered; torn apart and mostly eaten. The last of the peanut butter and jelly was licked clean, the lids torn straight off, the puncture marks of claws or jaws. There were no remains of the trail mix or protein bars, even our cooking oil had been drunk, two neat holes in the bottom of the bottle; the only food remaining was a little bit of chewed bread. The last of our food. That was the last of our food!

There was a situation like this on a car camping trip, where a raccoon had ransacked my hatchback. In our tents, the night before, I call out to Tom, "you closed the trunk?" "I'm sleeping! Yes I closed it!" Tom left the trunk open, in the morning he told a story (a lie) involving a raccoon, snake, and coyote. But the battery was low and there was no way a coyote could open a car door.

Now.

"Raccoon?" I ask Brandon.

"Bear."

"What?" Of course, it is obvious, but we hung such a perfect bear hang; I mean twenty

five feet up and out! It took some real skills to get it up there.

"Griz."

No. This didn't make sense to me; I had never seen any kind of bear before, and I am sure that grizzly bears don't make it this far south; I'm not sure that grizzly bears even live on the east coast; black bears sure, but never griz. Brandon was sure of it, never having seen the thing, he was sure of it. Either way I found myself overcome with despair, it was too early in the trip, too few miles in to rely completely on foraging and hunting. We need our remaining provisions. There is no way the others will stick it out if we rush them into full – on survival mode. I don't know if I could manage that.

Brandon showed a sort of wisdom (?) or comradery (?) something I am not sure how to describe. He asked me to clean up, guard what little we had left, and make sure no one woke up. If anyone did, I was to tell them that Brandon was feeling ill and was in the woods vomiting or having diarrhea or some other thing; they would have to wait anyway so they might as well go back to sleep. I didn't have to say anything. He returned in a few hours, with the sun only a hand and a half above the horizon, drenched in sweat bearing the load of half a weeks food for seven men.

That hike must have been close to twelve miles round trip. A week out, and only six miles from a grocer! We hiked another eight miles today with the others. It was an easy day for the group, our intended rest day with a few miles put in to make up for the day of drying out clothes, but I could see that Brandon's knees were feeling it. For him to have traveled those twelve miles before mid morning, he could have only made that distance running. And the weight of his pack on the return! I don't think the others noticed; I wanted to praise his efforts, let everyone know that he was the hero. But he made me swear in his *madman* and really scary way that I wouldn't say a word.

In the two or three hours that I had waited for him, as I hand-fed the left over bread to fearless chipmunks and red squirrels, his reasoning dawned on me. Well three possibilities came to mind:

1. He didn't want our friends to feel despair, to feel afraid, or vulnerable this early in the journey.
2. He didn't want our friends to know how close we were to civilization... it is just better that they think they are further out. It has been a week. The days are long, daylight lasts maybe 15 hours. We were estimating 3 miles an hour, 10 hours a day with some elevation gain and loss.

Add an hour for every 1000 feet of gain and loss. 20, 25 miles a day? A hundred twenty miles or so? I heard a distant fire station siren, and have seen the planes from the private airfield overhead. We have gone hardly 80 miles, not 120. Granted, the trail twists and turns and climbs the ridgelines of these foothills. But we have traveled in a week what I drive in little more than an hour.

3. He wanted to remain anonymous. What will the others feel that they have accomplished if they realize that they have been portered along by him?
- 3.5 No, maybe it is less about the ego of our companions, it is more about Brandon remaining in the shadows. Not everyone wants their powers to be called out into the open, their animal revealed to the masses. Brandon is wild, but a beast that will bear the yoke if it is to endure for his friends.

Animal Commune

I don't mean to understate the significance of feeding those small animals. I have always had an affinity for St. Francis, or was it Michaela? The one who would stand very still in the forest until the birds fed from his hands.

And there were the Native American's who would stalk their prey by keeping arms to their sides to hide their human form. My bond came from a certain stillness and patience, I'd like also to think from a state of stillness and peace within my mind, a compassion as well? I have been breathing more, from the belly, the ribs, and the chest. This attention to breath has kept my anxiety to a mild roar. Years ago I had worked on a farm, and was very focused on non-violence. In my work in the garlic fields I stepped on a hive of yellow jackets.

Click.

It felt like it went 'click', like triggering a trap or mine.

When I lifted my foot, the swarm sprang up. In moments I was covered.

"Move! Run!" The farm manager yelps out.

Backing away very slowly; this calm in my heart; no harm would come from any step I took. A hundred yards from the hive the bees came off, one by one. At a distinct yet invisible line they all left me, not stinging me at all. One bee stayed, but just across this line, watching me. It was my calm that kept me from being stung. Today, perhaps it is that same calm. The pre-dawn awareness that brings peace and connection to this wilderness. It is likely that I am being inducted into the forest. It is also possible that

the animals enjoy the processed flours and refined sugars in the bread.

Prior Planning, Self-care, Adaptation, Assimilation

Without revealing Brandon's secret I've insisted that we spend more daylight hours gathering wild edibles; supplementing our store bought calories; and weaning ourselves. We were already gathering white pine needles for supper tea, today we included stinging nettles and Queen Anne's lace with our stew.

As it is our "rest day" – restful in the sense that we only traversed eight miles of relatively flat, at most rolling, terrain, we have decided some spiritual, emotional and social tune ups are in order. This is perhaps the smartest idea we have come up with to manage our adjustment into the wilderness. It may also expedite the transformation of our hearts and minds. Into what? I am not at all sure. That is the trouble with this trip. I am surprised that within this first week, the others have not come at me with endless questions of goals, destinations, timelines and expectations. To be honest, I have come here with none. We've begun heading north, northeast. But apart from a wandering line towards the mountains, I have no intentions. Perhaps just the comradery and the adventure itself. But it is challenging to travel, exert

oneself, push beyond any notion of comfort, without an understanding of an objective. It might be considered insane. And not one of my friends has wondered or suggested that this journey is crazy. I suppose they also have their reasons; their own driven purpose, regardless of whether they can put the feelings to words; or they simply trust in the urge and let that compel them forward.

Jimmy though – I hadn't known this until last night around the fire – not only did he leave his parents, whom he lives with and has never been away from for longer than a week, but he had just met and fell in love with a girl. To my knowledge this is the second girl who has ever reciprocated his affection. It is curious that the Urge for Adventure came over him now. I'm not sure it did, it's possible that he just wanted to follow along, be in our company. On the other hand, and in his defense, I can remember an inspiration that filled me when courting my ex – a want to embody greatness beyond swimming in remote ice holes or dragging whole trees, stones, or pianos up hills. I'll give him the benefit of the doubt, but I'll need to test his commitment before we are too far out.

You see, he has never been one to complain: you'll never hear him peep one sound resembling complaint; but fear comes over him fast, and he is prone to injury, always by some

event beyond him; it is never his fault but it is as if he attracts it. *Silence* is his natural response to pain and fear; it isn't a stoic manning up, he has that possum reaction rather than flight, never mind a fight. His silence *is* cause for alarm. You never know how bad things are with him. His face keeps that same blank stare, masking a punctured lung or infatuation with a woman. What's worse is that his faculties begin shutting down. He sits there bleeding to death, staring into the forest, thinking of God knows, a girl probably, and it isn't until you holler: "Jimmy! Put some pressure on your gashing wound!" before he'll do anything, and putting pressure on it is all he'll do until you bark the next order. I shouldn't lay into Jimmy so hard. He's the youngest and I have an abundance of weaknesses myself.

This idea though! This ritual for our spiritual, emotional, and social strength. Yes, we are playing mountain-man, and the masks, the power animal masks, the *Indian* drum, it is ridiculous, maybe offensive if you thought we were joking; we are not, and it is funny. None of us would tell you otherwise. We are going to approximate a shamanic journey tonight. John thought this would add. I definitely think it has been worth the extra weight in our packs. We can't suddenly dismiss the creative; it is something more than plodding along, or building

a makeshift shack to survive the night. If we were to suddenly end the stimulation of the mind, or let the imagination wander without any exercise or direction... we would live fewer years than a beast, and with less purpose. It would be to sign up for early death, rather than legitimately seeking a new way to live. So the masks go on, and the drumming, and the aged lost boys trying to dance without shame around a fire, making rattles from gourds and empress tree seed pods. The laughter lasts – gut wrenching. What everyone chose for their power animal! Yes yes, we know you aren't *supposed* to guess or chose, but we had to start somewhere.

Tom drummed first. We lay down on the cooling earth, the fire close; really warm on one side; our masks on to also hide our eyes from the light.

I *walked* in the forest and searched for a hole. Into a hole, a hole in the ground leads you to a cave beneath the earth. My hole was almost a grave. It was a cut rectangle in the earth in the woods, with stairs leading down. It was dark, and came with the chills of the unknown. The beating drum, I felt my heart racing to match the pulse. I follow the stairs, which spiral down with earth walls lit by dim candles. The stairs bring me to the cave. In the cave you may find your power animal. Ask for him to show himself. To

be sure it is him, he will come to you in three different forms. Ask him to show you a dance or a song. This will help you return in the future or for some other strength. I saw mine. The dance was a funny jump, and duck, and jump and throw. Four distinct drum strikes remind us to return. The fast drumming lets us sweep back, returning so quickly to our camp.

John and Nate rise laughing and talking to each other. Jimmy is quiet but smiling. Brandon remains laying down. Sleeping? The others begin talking about their journeys. Nate had vivid visions that seem almost too spectacular to believe. "Bullshit!" John says, "man I got screwed! I couldn't focus, I kept imagining Captain Crunch cereal, then this mosquito wouldn't stop biting." Nate agrees to drum again so that Tom can have a go, and John can try again. Jimmy wants to go back, he lays down eager and masked: a trout face. They gesture to me. "I have to crap, you guys go ahead."

Nate begins drumming. He strikes the thing harder than Tom had. And there is a new power to how he plays the thing, with a song of wind and whispers that carries so far from his lungs into the woods. The others have already begun. I wander out to get further away from the stream.

Again the sky is crisp, the stars piercing. Shadows of these tall woody beasts flicker from

the camp fire; shifting to the pounding rhythm
Nate hammers out. I turn over a heavy rock for a
cat-hole to drop trowel. My back against a tree,
the most pleasant position for such a thing.

The tree trunks dance with their shadows
and the fire and the little wind.

Amidst the flickering woody beasts there
is some other massive thing.

This shadow is not so tall as the trees, still
it is nothing less than a giant and *horrible*.

It is big, I've seen that, but as it turns
about and comes into a clearing from between
trees, movement reveals his size.

I had thought they were like large dogs.

That is what I had heard.

This is a truck!

He turns round.

He turns round towards me.

His snout sniffing, puffing, snorting,
towards me, close enough, so strong that I can
hear his breath over the beating drum.

This is wilderness, and it is scary.

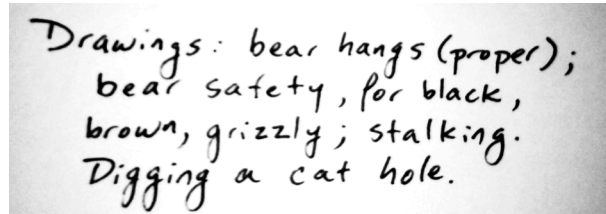
In the darkness his glassy eyes are
mirrors. And there I am!

He is looking towards me!

Not at me?

There is something else in the darkness,
something closer, some other beast; with eyes
bound to the bears; so fierce I needn't see it. In
the black, between the trees and the stars and

crisp air I cannot see at all but I know its
Brandon, in his eyes, piercing through, those
same madman eyes. He didn't see me, or
wouldn't look at me, or didn't care, he was
staring at the bear: those same madman eyes,
those same madman eyes!



3

Keeping Record

I'll do this story harm just in telling it. It has already been told so here I am retelling that telling. And truth has been and will be lost in every association made: assumption and my choice of words. I also admit that I am only willing or able to listen so well, and in my mind each word turns round its own images likely a thousand steps from those experienced.

Truth was lost (or missing) from the first telling; Jimmy's memories and recounts are surely something other than what "actually" happened – let alone what was experienced by the *Girl with Eyes*, or by Mitz.

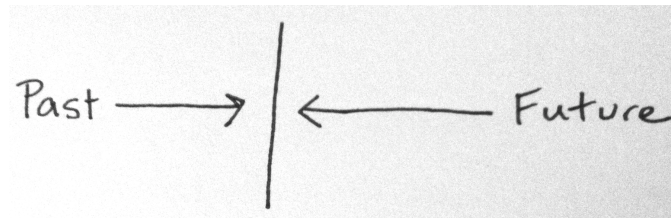
I suppose then there is this *duty* of the writer? To put in words an experience that

could not be articulated by another? Because Jimmy is not so clever? No he is. And this telling is of course really my own story, just inspired by his.

Jimmy, he is the heart and the child we all feel. The Neverland I pretend to live within, the one *they* pat me on the back for, “keep doing all these very many amazing endeavors that you live!” Meanwhile the sadness within my smile (not behind: the smile is legitimate). For *them* the sadness is critical, *they* would have me in this place between forever. These are only the things I like to do, they mean nothing for love, or value. Do not grow enamored because I do things. I am only a sad man. I might be a Peter Pan, but Jimmy **is** Neverland. His wandering in love is the breath that I’ll take to live with Pain and laugh still, not despite.

But I should be careful of these *reductive* sentiments; Jimmy shouldn’t be categorized. This is a mess, to fall into such easy divisions, even the small or difficult divisions, the smallest division wouldn’t be small enough, it will assume too much. To imagine that we can measure anything is a horrible fallacy and disgrace – or at least it suggests a finite frame with inputs that are not inherent but chosen and therefore the outcome too. Call a thing by a name and associate your own experience: “I’ve known death; I’ve known heart ache; I’ve known the

mid-twenties existential crisis.” You know nothing, only a reflection of your own experience. That experience is not even yours! *Specialization* divides, *truth* closes doors and *new perspectives*, ancestral knowledge embraces (should embrace) disenchantment and change; the past and future are maybe relative to the present, and the fodder that forms a destructive thought is the same as those we embrace, only determined by what we want to see.



A bit crude: the linear boundaries,
try imagining these lines coming in from infinite
directions

...

Are you thinking of a ball with a center? That is
not infinite at all!

A circle, a sphere, they are closed.

Practice imagining what you’ve never seen.

Hell I am writing like a child. I am the
frustrated little monster clutching to words.

Still I'll write this mess. But forgive me that it is not all true, or not true at all, or that anything remarkable is likely true, and anything mundane is the mess that I couldn't sort out.

The story begins then with the autumn air – short days already!

Of the air: the crisp, sharp; the leaves and dirt and fire. We always smell like fire now. It is preferred. Our pride passing day hikers, seeing their noses rise and their eyes close for a moment; from those precious and sensitive. If their lips stretch out for a smile and their chest lifts and falls I am in love again. These smells and in the morning my last dreams are memories of angst ridden teenage dates. Strange. *The girl* sitting on my lap in a packed car. Her choking hair and weight on my fragile. I can smell my breath off her neck, ripe with the garlic I greedily ate, neglecting the social tact that comes with the chance for a kiss.

Jimmy and Nate sleep in later, sometimes their smoky odor smells different than ours, and Jim is sick – he is digging cat holes more often. Cat holes for fish shits – but a dozen before noon? This triggered suspicion, by way of loose stool the other evidence began making sense: the late sleeping, the garlic dreams, the body odor, the ash in the fire – not coals but these thin layered sheets; it has been weeks since we've used paper or cardboard for kindling. But

because I am slow and dull, it'll take something more clear, so this continued for a week and I said nothing. Then their big *mistake*, or were they admitting, telling, asking?:

the pizza box
a small corner not burned by the fire
of course!
Jimmy is lactose intolerant.

Pizza! (Fuming (I am)) I am only angry at them for a moment, then angry again but at myself. I have done them wrong. How? Has the transition to caught food been all too sudden? This immersion into the forest and away too thorough(?), or not enough? No, no, it is their choice to be here as well. Donald is gone already, finding his own path. They can have *pizza* – but why *pizza*? I am harmed just writing that word into this account, in this journal. It is a silly word, terrible. And an insubstantial food. It might not be a food at all. It is an unconscious and vapid party. Maybe pizza was just an excuse to go to town to see lights or to dance...

No, no, although I am proud of my care for intension, the importance I owe each endeavor, always with love and care, I am not happy that I impart this upon others – I shouldn't expect the same. It should not hurt me when others don't

fucking care! (Come on, 'when they do not conform to my values' is what I mean.)

Don't turn this around again. We've done our best to choose a route that keeps to the wilderness and avoids the roads and towns. But we've had almost daily reminders that we are still so close to home. Today's was at least more beautiful than days past: the mid-morning church bells. Tom felt as if he recognized them specific to a church he had been by before. We all had to admit that their song and tone were particular and beautiful – sounded like real bells played by a real bell toll. Sad though; if Tom is right our estimated 560 plus plus plus miles is closer to 300, maybe 350 if you count the twists and bends and altitude gain and drop. I wonder how long it will be until we feel like we are far out? Most of us have been this far north by train or car in the past. I've even hiked in the mountains that are still weeks ahead of us. And while we are only a five-hour car ride from home, our legs (and now our will) are feeling the distance.

Day 28

For context: the last of the store bought food is gone; the second round of food as well – save the oil, salt, pepper, and tea. We've had to shorten our hikes: longer hours to collect greens and catch fish. Each promising trout stocked

brook becomes our daily stopping point. I suppose we've only clocked five to ten miles per day this week. The longer hiking days leave us hungry and weak, so we have to catch more fish to recover strength. There is so much killing to push on the next day. I hardly know the fish, and can empathize with *her* little more than I can the leaves I cut or roots I unearth; except *her* eyes, but with enough death those have blurred into the day; another passing. We thank them, and apologize that we have to murder them. We thank them, and apologize that we have chosen this reality; we could have lived as we did before, in a town with farm grown food not bound to the local region's limits (trucks and boats and planes and crates); it is hard to weigh the harm we cause now as opposed to before, now that we look the animal right in *her* eyes. It is hard to consider, so we ignore it like we did when we lived amongst.

We still have these luxuries to wean us off our comforts (the hot earl grey tea every morning). This brand is not overly rich with bergamot, which is a complaint I have of some earl grey's – they saturate your taste buds with what should be a subtle flavor, soon enough you'll never want to taste it ever again – all spice no substance.

all prose no plot

Foraging: stinging nettles, dandelion, and thistle are easy enough to find. The attempt today will be trickier wild edibles: Queen Anne's lace, trying not to mix it up with it's deadly doppelganger and Socrates' suicide tool: eastern water-hemlock. It'll be a while longer before we are out of tea, but we have already begun including white pine needles to our brew to acquire the taste and what ever other supernatural (or unseen natural) properties of assimilation to the wilds that might be attained through consumption.

It is possible that the first domino that fell was the hatchet we found along the trail. You can't imagine how much faster shelters have been put up, or the ease in collecting firewood to burn. Such a tool of luxury has serious impacts on community. Amish elders would have had to assemble council to decide if such a thing would eliminate too much dependence thus crushing community, before allowing it into their midst. The game of breaking deadfall into burnable bits has been lost to the pragmatic ease of cutting the wood. Time saved. Hardship reduced. Interdependence impacted.

It is possible that the acquisition of this tool led to the want of other luxuries, and to the subsequent madness. Jimmy and Nate's secret hike 10 miles into town and back again in the

middle of the night for a pesto pizza is certainly the action of madness, but that they carried the entire box back to our campsite before devouring the delicious Delicious, not even eating a single bite before returning to camp – that is just fucked up.

Of course the purity of our travels, or the intentions behind them have been poisoned; but if I bring this discovery before the group before addressing the underlying issues, they might all be inspired to indulge in an insane binge of consumer frenzy and the whole expedition is jeopardized.

Trying to isolate the others from the temptations of the *civil*, locking them away in our ivory tower! Naturally they are drawn to return to a town. It is no wonder, given no *direction*! How long could they wander without aim?

So I've revealed the destination. It might have been wiser to have waited until Sunday as that has now become a day of digestion and re-cooperation: the day for the hunt, skinning, and packing of meat. The one day for large salads and cooking greens. It has become that much easier to save all chores for this day. To make every evening after walking that much easier. Once we decided to proceed in this fashion – it came about quite naturally and once it had become habit we simply acknowledged it and agreed it was good; since making that

decision the general morale has risen. We hike many more hours, totting heavy packs in the early week to be light again by Sundays.

Hunting

We have begun hunting larger *game*: only one death for the entire week, sometimes lasting longer. Only one set of eyes, and we take turns looking directly. We look directly into *her* eyes. Having a friend with you (to also look) helps, but some opt to look alone. Brandon likely takes the most time in staring. Which is odd for he is definitely the most savage amongst us – it can be seen there, barely held in by this thin layer of humanity. This week he took on the cleaning by himself as we gathered the weekly salad and soup.

Another reminder that despite living this illusion, the wild man's struggle, we share the world if not in reality, in physical space with the lives we previously lived and, too easily, could go back to. Even in the rising hills there are the backpackers, families, and day hiker. This kill was made a bit too close to the trail, and this mother and son looking for some refuge to dig a cat hole happened upon Brandon; not that any of us are easy to look at – we all appear abused and strange – but we can put strangers at ease with civil conversation and the wit customary to our friends in town. But with Brandon; imagine the

shock and lasting nightmares that consume that woman and child finding him with the laid out innards of this morning's kill; the feet and the head to the side, once the staring is done (a habit we developed after talking about med schools and cadavers).

It was enough for him to stare the poor thing (dead) in the eyes for the hour he tends to take, but that the human mother and son had to endure his staring also! Once realizing the trauma he inspired he was so overcome with shame; to punish or redeem himself of this terrible crime he sat upright and still by the mountain lake in the early morning, letting the mosquitos feast without flinch or swat, no killing or even waving away. He let them dig deep, for the digging must be deep through his leathered skin. Who implanted such guilt and self-flagellating notions into his tortured mind?

Sundays

Despite the toll this day takes on each of us, it is a day in which we have time. The other days have become relentless marches. And our bodies are only beginning to catch up to our self-imposed pace. So it's best to have hard conversations on Sundays – it was Friday. Still I had to address *direction*, though I should have waited. I knew that it has been brewing and

festering and so I was impatient to relieve that wonder before it became infectious.

Direction

I told them and it incited anger.

Brandon stormed off and was missing until the following day. He came back more or less well groomed but with more substantial bruising and some cuts about the face and some blood soaking through his shirt. He kept covered, tightly wrapping a bearskin (which no one asked from where it came) around his shoulders, the monstrous mouth engulfing his head, so I am not sure how deep his wounds were. I was almost certain he'd be delivering his farewells. Instead he said nothing, finding his place amongst the group, his typical animated and entertaining self, often thoughtful in conversation as well, in the most dear friend of a way.

"We are taking this range north, then northeast, across Baffin Island, across the Davis Strait to Greenland, traversing the coast then across the open ocean stopping in Iceland, then to Norway." That is what I said. It is a course I have thought about for years, and as we were already heading in that direction, I stated it to *inspire* through *objective*.

with faces and forms, froms and faults, fates and forlornes.

Wandering appears as you expect: wanderlust;
but wanderlust has come in so many incarnations.
The never 'settling-down' as would a devoted spouse,
the 'can't hold a job' as would a reliable worker,
the 'drop-out' as would not the educated,
the 'unaccomplished' who others frustratingly excuse and
blame reasons of perfectionism or fear of failure,
the 'undecided' who lays below the 'specialist' (the
specialist has *mastery* and *recognition* in the long scepter
he pokes at the underlying to keep the strength of his
steel).

The wanderer may be the man always on the road, but
there are also professionals who have mastered this
mastery of walking along. And they are perhaps not
wandering at all. You can tell by their cool look, and the "if
you look deep enough inner turmoil" that is **not** there; or
is, but the one or the other informs the first question. I'd
argue that all who wander look to find place but should
remember 'why the wandering?' And with that argument
I'd include that all those who have found such a place are
perhaps more lost than ever and should take to wandering
such that they might find their way. I'd also argue that we
are not trying to find an answer that works (truly), but I
appreciate the understanding of those who are not
understood.

They said I was wrong.

**Jimmy says so, by way of this Girl with Eyes,
and of Mitz**

It was not a sneaking out per say: the
midnight hikes. Or they (Nate and Jim) laughed
as they did (sneak), laughing only a mile from
camp. Laughing that there *needed* to be any

feeling of secrecy. There is nothing binding them here; maybe the unspoken solidarity, and the encroaching rules of group think. None of which bothered them so much, but knowing that there was something just for themselves, between the two of them in the even colder and quieter woods, made for a magick, one that inspires a nostalgia for boarding school in me; those early early mornings (or late late nights: just about the same hour). These midnight hikes began the first week we started in the woods. At first just walks to gain vistas and see stars, or to follow fox and deer along their nightly ritual, but gaining the ridge that overlooks the sea and the lights of a town below brewed up feelings, that their midnight spell shadowed any memories of the world they left behind. This would be a place of wonder. New. And they (Nate and Jim) were right.

In town it would be the same walking about as in the forest. Soaking in the romance of each street light and warmly lit restaurant and café and antique shop. The pizza only came after finding money on the street. We typically have none. None that I know of. I imagine that the moment money was in hand the idea of buying something also sprung. Not before. Never before. That was how I was on Fridays when living in town, or anytime I was sad: retail therapy. Sadness is different now. Something

constant. The base layer, the air, the water, the fodder for form. Not really different from happy.

Jimmy and Nate walked into the pizza shop. Already certain of their order. Just outside there is a long girl with red and curled hair and smile and eyes, and all those things that make you feel in love and ridiculous, but not silly, just struck. The girl with red hair and bicycle has the best eyes. If seen by a crowd, all think for themselves; were they honest, they'd admit, the eyes are for Jimmy. Ridiculous Jimmy gets the eyes. Good for Jimmy. Jimmy will keep that infection for himself.

He gives eyes, the best his shyness will allow. She gives eyes again, not afraid like him. And he gives eyes, and she gives eyes. And this continues until the order's up and he leaves the shop: pesto pizza.

"The redhead girl was very pretty."

"I thought you were going to talk to her Jim."

"Why? There's no context. It'd be weird."

"Does there have to be? It isn't wrong to think a girl is pretty."

"But it doesn't matter, we live in the woods, and are always moving... Anyhow I am still in love."

"...yeah that's hard."

They are sitting by the water. Taking in the bay. There is a pier a few hundred yards

across. Though dark and distant they can see her walking out. Jimmy knows her walk already. And the bicycle she pushes along the wooden walk makes it obvious.

"You should talk to her."

"How?"

"..."

"Maybe if I swam out to her, there would be reason just in the absurdity."

"Trick yourself into it?"

"Just make it not so abrupt. I would have to then."

"There are a lot of people here. Once you strip down you are kind of committed; it would be weird to take off your clothes and just put them back on."

Jimmy nods and strips to his shorts. His skinny frame and the bright blue, shiny boxer shorts he is wearing.

Nate has jumped up to test the water with a foot, "Pretty cold Jimmy."

"Committed," looking at himself and laughing.

Now this impresses me, because I would have guessed that Jimmy would have drowned and Nate would have had to swim after him and pump his chest. But Jim swam out to the pier; his limbs turned to pins and needles and then ghostly things hardly there, save that he could see them. The heart in throat imbedded itself firmly,

its new home. For 10 minutes in the just short of freezing waters. The metal rungs of the ladder are both a relief and a sudden concern, again needing to look to make sure he was actually placing feet and hands, pulling 'too' strong, trying to feel the blood in them. Then on the wooden platform. She is sitting, looking his way, though not alarmed that he has come up from the water. The passage has made him a *man*; he walks without hesitation and sits by her.

"Good swim?"

"It's a bit cold."

"Yeah, I stopped going in a few weeks ago."

"..."

"..."

"I swam here to work up the nerve to tell you that I think you are very beautiful."

Smiles, not bashful.

"You live in town?"

It becomes apparent that he does not know what 'town' this is. So he gets to more core questions: "What's your name?"

"Isabella."

He sits up, but he doesn't know why this is especially striking. Later he'll remember that Isabella is his favorite name. We, at camp, nearly all agree (Nate likes Gertrude, Bernadette, and Pillar).

What's your name?

"I'm Jimmy."

"Oh, you're Jimmy." As if she had heard of him.

"Oh? What does that mean to you?"

"My boyfriend's name is Jimmy."

"Thank you for the swim."

An excellent exit Jim!

One quick choice: walk the pier to the street and around (as he is nearly dry)? No, complete the gesture: back down the rungs into the frigid mouth of the desert (the ocean is of course a huge desert).

The initial shock is worse than before. His body is not as willing. Not as enduring. He rolls to his back immediately, trusting this float and stroke more, breathing so deliberately, focused on the idea of swimming, not sure if his arms and legs will comply. He may need Nate after all, but does not call out, he will not scream out for help, not until closer to shore, or further from the pier, or until absolutely necessary. He must maintain the scene. It is the correct gesture for Isabella.

One would think that he departed because she has a man. And while this is in part true, *One* might also think that the departure came because his expectations had met a wall; or that he had intentions at all. But this is the wrong assumption. And now you don't believe me at all, because why would he risk life (or even his

comfort) to speak with a beautiful girl for whom he has no expected outcomes? It is; in this; for the sake of gesture; because there is the *turning* power in his chest, and then he finds himself in his shiny shorts on the shore, and so he has to go into the water, and it is cold but he can easily walk forward until the water is at his neck and he swims not despite of pain, but with the pain as it is a part of the *thing*, and the *thing* rolls over itself building stronger. Then he is like a man not just on the outside as he walks up to her, but in his heart there is nothing but this *turning thing* in his chest. And it is for the *turning thing*, not to sleep with a beautiful girl, nor to impress Nate on the shore. And her cue: she has a beau named Jimmy – this is simply the correct moment of departure. Not because of the content, but because of timing or declaration from the *turning*. And the near death return is simply the correct action for the moment, as dictated by the *turning* itself.

On the shore he makes his way to Nate, setting each foot down as deliberately as he can manage, but with force to be sure the thing is planted upon the sand and stones. His muscles are pulled up into themselves, and he can feel nothing but his bones pushing. His organs are slow and quiet, save his stomach and lungs, which cry. As the ghost-like becomes needles again, his body turns a step more vicious: he

wants to vomit and weep. Nate is laughing, because this is funny, but he takes care to ensure Jimmy won't die. He dries him and makes him dress, save pants because his shorts are still drenched.

Mitz comes (pronounced Mit-Z, Mit as in fit or sit, and Z as in the sound of the letter Z: zee). She is not unknown, but is unexpected. She was from their hometown: a friend of friends. Maybe even a friend herself once or twice, but over time meaning had been lost, by way of years or diluted by other thin and distant interactions: parties or busy passing bys on the streets and such and such. And now she is in this town as well, which is surprising to both Nate and Jimmy – or would be if either could be surprised. Jimmy might be if in a normal state, were he not falling into hypothermic shock; Nate, never really – never really shocked. Any surprise from Nate is an act: humoring normal human behavior. No animal, gnome, or nice girl can startle him. What is surprising is that Mitz is the same. She says “hello” as if she had seen them earlier that day, and walks over to sit on a drift wood log by Jim opposite Nate. She has heard something of us all leaving into the woods together a month prior. She had also left around this time, but had come to this town. At night she comes to the water here, sometimes to swim, but often just to watch the lights in reflection.

Jimmy is ready to wretch, pale and fading, so she begins tapping on his fingers, his wrist, his face, his neck.

Tap tap tap, tap tap tap, tap tap tap, tap tap tap.

He is mostly a zombie, but looks up and she might smile, then he sinks further, laying into her leg, focusing on breathing.

As he collects himself, he realizes that she has been tapping for a long time. Nate has gone off to skip stones. Jim looks towards the pizza, Nate didn't eat any – he waited for Jimmy, and the plan. He musters the will to pull on his pants; he is shivering; Mitz holds him – and I promise you that this is something motherly –

I knew I would ruin the story! The problem is that I am writing this account! But who else will? Jimmy is not inclined. He lived it, and has let it permeate, it has changed him, and he is not plagued with this need to capture. How do I describe something I can barely understand? He nestled his head into her arms and took in all her warmth, and was surely as in love as he ever could have been before, but the thing was only that, and there was no want for anything more, though that *thing* that *turns* which we might confuse for want, or that we might think needs to be satisfied, stirred and tumbled and as if to burst! He is so brave as to let that *thing* run

unbridled, not exercising the power with cheap release: a kiss, a poem, the screaming and running, or the shameful imagining and rubbing out beneath shadows of sweet gum trees, moss, mushrooms, and the night blooming lilies!

But what is important here, or so Jimmy tells me because I clearly do not understand, is of Mitz. It is not only what she inspires in Jim, but what she is. And this is maybe why Jimmy writes nothing down, for I do him no justice, certainly not her, of whom I have an account of an impression. The pages say nothing, they are so paper thin, and I am all the more for the writing. But it has become my duty, or my catharsis, so I'll make my best effort, and all these words of excuse and apology.

Of Mitz, an account of an impression

She is first and foremost a feral beast.

Maybe others only see a pretty girl, that is what I saw.

But Jimmy is certain that she is wild, and she admitted as much when he said so.

She said, "you see through me huh?"

When he said "I saw you read a poem in the café, and I thought 'look! That wild animal has learned to write nice words.'"

She laughed then and said, "you see through me."

Other evidence is when they picked blackberries together and she was barefoot and leapt up into the bushes to get the highest berries for they are the plumpest.

She didn't flinch or hesitate, and got to the ones she wanted.

Even after our skin has leathered after this month in the woods, there is care for these thorns.

(Jimmy did get off to see her a few times; sometimes Jim hiking much further in the night; sometimes her driving further north as we've traveled.)

But the animal bit is perhaps not foremost,

Maybe her capacity to play?

Is that a part of the animal bit?

Jim sat in a tree with her so late at night,

Hugging the leaning branch in his arms while she told him of growing up by a stream with her dog.

Always dancing and playing with this dog.

He tells her of the girl he loves.

And she tells him of her dog who died and how she wept,

How her parents would watch her cry herself to sleep,

For years and the crying hasn't stopped,

The same as Jim.

Nor has the playing, stopped.

And so you might see her dancing, often spinning in relentless circles,

Or climbing trees of course,

And swimming in frozen water,

Standing on her hands,

And flipping again and again and again and again,

But never wanting for an audience,

And still crying for her dog.

Relevant Revision

I lied about the eyes of the fish and of the deer. I remember each pair, knowing them as well as the leaves and roots and much more also. Pleading and wondering and gasping. I remember theirs the same as every girl I have loved. And I have only permitted being in love

each time, the same as with every woman. But I have not let an ounce of it go. I carry that with the death of each beast and I make each heavy step, smiling up at the sun through the rattling leaves and autumn. To keep killing? What of food?!

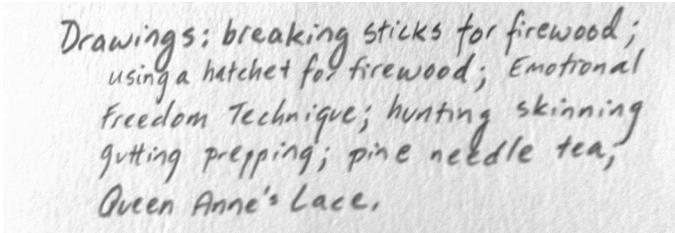
Jimmy has fallen in love. Though he says, "it has nothing to do with her as a beast, though that is how she is." The love does not come from the circumstances of her life, or the way that she is. And this is perplexing to me. But I feel like I might begin to understand. I see Jimmy who is sad, so sad from *losing*, but unwilling to abandon the love he has. How does a small boy have such a large space for these bursting feelings? He's like a dog? Or what I think a sad uncle could be. I can see that he is tragically sad, but for the *World* it is fuller. Expectation is broken, and the love goes nowhere; but everywhere; the capacity for everywhere; "stays".

For this he is braver than anyone, stronger than anyone. He is the warrior who would do *right*, never with outcome in mind. And rarely rewarded. He can love and not be loved. He can give and not receive. He can take pain and laugh and give back only tender touches. And even those things – don't latch onto those ideas as tenants! You would be mistaken again, there isn't some greater

satisfaction in being a martyr. It is only that he would do as he sees fit and not for outcome.

I don't understand this entirely, but I feel it enough that I see that declaring our destination is so far from useful. I am neither correct about needing direction, nor the assumption that this is my responsibility to discover or spell out. "Following the heart" mustn't be used as an excuse for escaping the uncomfortable. I say 'mustn't' but naturally everyone can and should do as they please; some never facing their trials. But many of the difficulties that come and manifest in discomfort will follow a person despite their escape – pursuits of the heart may then be undermined, infected or simply false. Do you understand why then, a destination would ruin the thing? Would be an easy release for the power, when we might hold the thing in our hearts instead?

I see weak Jimmy act so strong, and I hit myself and cry that I haven't the strength to be the same for the girl I left behind. And in all these words I know I am entirely lost and have missed the point.



Drawings; breaking sticks for firewood;
using a hatchet for firewood; Emotional
Freedom Technique; hunting skinning
gutting prepping; pine needle tea,
Queen Anne's Lace.

4

Allergies

I suppose I should begin with my understanding of Anaphylaxis: the wild, overreaction to allergens or foreign proteins. This indulgent response; this reaction that would outdo the harm of the initial threat. Rather than the controlled use of white blood cells, antibodies, and localized inflammation to contain such an invader; your body panics with the systemic release of histamines... Imagine the 'fool' who might throw themselves off the side of a roof for fear of a bee. I have seen people do this. I cannot believe people do this. That flooding release of histamines, intended to crush the alien (flush and shield the body), but only you feel the looming darkness. You are dying, but your body has killed you and no one else.

I am not entirely sure that an anaphylactic reaction killed Nate. And although it is neither scientifically sound nor remotely logical to correlate behavior with immune response I must note that Nate was never the type to run from bees, certainly not the kind to

pitch off a roof. He is calm. He might not even move a hand to shoo a bee away. I could imagine him sitting peacefully, continuing about whatever task he had at hand, so calm that the bee would hardly inquire – no more than it would toward a non-flowering plant or rock.

Does the body mirror the man?

Or the man indicate the habits of the body?

These are ridiculous queries. These suggestions come from my trauma – I am traumatized. For myself, I admit, my calm focus and direction mask (or sit atop – at the very least) a well of pressured fears that I consciously monitor, always arming myself with the tools to keep *level*. Nate, his peace is not staged. It seems to rest at his very center. I know, I know, my logic is not sound. Perhaps I should consider the health of his liver and not his mind. But with that calm! I can't imagine that his immune system would stray from these sagely paths.

He is only a man. Even if a speck of fear is buried, no matter how deep, a thousand bees over how many hours (?) might unlock innate human madness.

Death. Especially a torturous and painful death is not funny. I imagine that the trauma I have sustained from simply bearing witness to Nate's death will outmatch even watching my brother fall from a bridge onto rocks head first.

That rainbow of blood remains deeply etched. How did his skull not crack? I could see the subcutaneous tissue in his head: the fat. And though he was disoriented, with pupils dilated, and a moment of memory lapse; saying again and again "I am fine, I'm just so tired, just really tired," there was no indication of permanent brain injury. On second thought, that is debatable. Ha ha! I kind of laughed about that, years later. I am not laughing about Nate, I am traumatized, and it is not funny, but it might be absurd.

On Sunday, today being Monday, we dreamt of, over smoking the week's meat, of how nice honey would be: candied jerky. Off Nate went, in his best Pooh form, stalking a bee to her hive (frolicking after is perhaps a more appropriate description). How does one end up with arms so swollen that they cannot fit out the hole they entered? The hole was not so small, he would have had to keep very still, being stung again and again, without withdrawing until the swelling had sufficiently sealed him in. We found him hours later like this, covered in hives, dangling, arms in the hollow of the tree 30 feet from the ground.

Step 1: Scene Size up

I'm number One: am I at risk? What are the risks? Bees. They were all dead from

stinging Nate or sealed in the hole of the tree by his arms. Other risks: heights. This risk might only be managed by calling in a team of high angle responders. We have no means of communication, we are dozens of miles from definitive care, and he is dying. Furthermore this is Nate! So we take care with our approach and fashion at least make shift safety harnesses and a top anchor.

Number Two, what happened to you? Mechanism of Injury. Bees. I don't know what happened. Nothing makes sense.

Number Three, nothing on me: Body Substance Isolation. We have no gloves or masks, no sunglasses.

Number four, are there any more? Just Nate. And there are no bystanders, we are in the wilderness. There are eight of us – six, Nate is the victim and Donald is still in the cave.

Number Five, dead or alive? He looks closer to death than life.

Step 2: Life Threats: stop and fix. ABCDE

Airway: his airways look like stuffed sausages.

Breathing: a faint wheezing squeezes out from his swollen throat.

Circulation: his heart is racing. No watch, no idea how many beats per minute, but no major bleeding.

Disability/decision: no mechanism of injury to the spine.

Environment/expose: we cannot move him, eventually we could consider blankets.

Step 3: Wait wait, the order. Above, Stop and Fix, life threats, A airways

administer Epinephrine 0.3-0.5mg 1 to 1000 every 10-15 minutes as need, into the thigh with auto injector or into the shoulder with syringe. When the patient can swallow, follow with oral intake of 25-50mg diphenhydramine 1 mg/kg up to 60mg prednisone. For Nate I suppose that is a full 60mg. Put patient in a position of ease, reassure, provide oxygen, monitor airways and provide positive pressured ventilation if necessary.

We can do none of these things. We have no drugs. We cannot move Nate. We have no oxygen. His airways are closed so rescue breathing is futile. And any lie we'd feed him that things are ok would be laughed at if he could. We have knives, handkerchiefs, arrowheads, blankets, and a nail.

A bic pen, or a reed forced down his throat? We have neither, that is probably a bad idea anyhow.

We cannot scrape stingers from his arms. We cannot access his arms.

Warm salt water. I have no idea of how or why that might work. Perhaps an aid to his liver

to help process toxins, or to add fluids to prevent vascular shock (too late: he is flushed, his pulse has gone from rapid to weak, his breathing has gone from desperate to almost nothing, his pupils have filled his eyes, he barely responds to pain). His airways are not protected; to have him drink might result in drowning.

We could perform a cricothyrotomy. But to guide Nate into death by stabbing holes in his throat randomly hoping for an airway would be no better than throwing him off a roof.

Jimmy and Brandon stay with him. Rigging him a harness in the event his arms stop swelling he wouldn't fall 30 feet to the ground. The others gather Echinacea, stinging nettle (leaves and root), arnica, amaranths, plantain, and jewel weed. Each of these has anti-inflammatory properties, or antihistamines. The first four we prepare as a tea to use as a wash. Plantain we chew into a paste. And jewelweed we simply break the stalk to use the fluids as a wash. Oh what delightful plants these all are. For their flowers, their hardiness, and their medicinal properties. Even the stinging nettle, I take the time to pick deliberately. If you pinch strongly – the stinging hairs are only painful if they brush along your skin, if you pinch strongly there is no itch or inflammation. We have had a bit of this with stew on Sundays. Even with Nate

in the tree I think calmly of picking these plants; it is not so much a distancing from Nate or his death, but the calm helps me as well. Less monitoring, and more breathing, focused on the task at hand, picking nettles.

It is too late. It was too late when we came upon him. He stopped breathing soon after we arrived. His pulse ended shortly after that. Jimmy tried giving CPR, valiantly, 30 feet up with the patient face first against the tree. His last gasps of air whistled past his trapped vocal chords. Skin riddled with hives, and swelling. To add shame to death, his pants were filled with excrement and his face with sick. Writing this, I feel nauseous: his body dangling from his drowning arms.

Perhaps reassurance was the best thing we could have done. Better to have had his friends in the tree kindly caring for his comforts with the view of the valley below and the crisp autumn sunset than our panicked attempt at doing nothing for him but adorning him with flowers and weeds. So we camp in the tree and below. Waiting for the swelling to reduce so that we can lower his body.

In the early morning – before morning, hours before the sunrise Brandon lets us know that Nate is seated in his harness. His arms are red and covered in honey. We lower him to the ground and lay him on blankets. He stays there

for days. So do we, for a while. Then we mill about, thinking to prepare more meat than we can carry. We don't know how to manage his death. Somehow hunting doesn't feel right. Should this end our trip? Or should we at least return to the world to manage his body and family? The thoughts of the legal investigations, the unanswerable inquiries from the family and our other friends about our trip; the idea of facing that world after only just overcoming the withdrawal of comforts.

We wait for days.

Until the waiting is senseless.

We persist without reason.

And after a week Nate wakes up.

Elders: who were Nate's elders?

Separation: Distinct separation from the Profane. Why the transition from happy go lucky, this search for honey to the predicament he ends up in?

Sacred space: the light, the time, the space that allows change within him

Symbolic Death: actual

Ordeal: limit-experiences: sleep deprivation, tremendous pain, vision quests, starvation, drowning, psychedelic substance use, sensory overload, repetitive percussion and dancing

Revelation: teachings from 'worldly' elders and 'unworldly' spirit guides as to the attributes of the soon to embody role; how will this come out?

Disenchantment: the questioning of their teachings: both elders and spirits

Rebirth: completion of the metamorphosis, from child to adult, from initiate to boundary man; Nate awakens, but how is he changed? How is he the same? Would he define his role?

Reintegration: welcoming the new person (role); what reunion? What celebration? Shall we name the thing?

5

How can I talk about the Guru? I do not know him or his thoughts. I can read him less than most, and I wouldn't dare to assume *most*. I know my own (thoughts); I can tell you those; they are muddled, sometimes in total agreement and at other times completely overcome with conflict, sometimes humble and sometimes arrogant and all knowing. If I begin to preach I am sorry. You could skip over this entire passage of journal if it doesn't suit you. I write in here to make light of the stronger feelings. It is not that I will not face them in the day, or take on the ugliest of myself – I do, more than most (arrogant). It is only that by keeping this document I might remember. And sometimes I write things down to read later to my friends when they are feeling down trodden, when they have had too many days of lightning or strong winds in a row and need to laugh about the thing more. I am no master of documentation, but I have found that stepping out from this moment to reflect or observe the very thing you are

experiencing cuts the edge – like a drink or holding onto the arm of your sweet heart, dear friend, child, aging parent, or nuzzling dog. The drink, the doing for others, and the documenting of the thing makes *it* something entirely different.

Guru In the Woods

We met the Guru on an evening that I had wanted to sleep, but the moon was far too bright, almost like the sun I could feel his heat. We should have been hiking in the night with that much light, and because the afternoon thunderstorms kept us in the valley half the day lit hours, but we've been stubborn; there is no excuse but 'stubborn' –

Finding the pass between peaks or the path of least resistance straight up and over during the night, really?

It is fine, it is fine to do that at night, with this much moonlight it is fine. It would be perfect.

But we did not. We were stubborn, we would hike up and descend again before noon, hurrying back into the valley to watch the majesty of the clouds that roll and crash. And it is not for these excuses or any other that you may think up that we would waste the day, or the nights; we had been stubborn, but as it seems now, for good reason.

You can see so much of the storm here, so much sky, the clouds from miles away – or before, when the storm is less than a thought, just the random collisions and bonding and tearing apart, the moisture, the heat and cold, some making. And when they collect and roll along an invisible loft and pushing down, the first from below, the second from above. From below, we can see the invisible shield over the mountains. It is from this pushing against and the volume of visible forms that we begin to imagine what we could not perceive before (see). Then! Then they (the clouds) might roll into massive anvils that would crash down with little pity and with all the intention to make animals run and hide and for us to laugh out suddenly and point and jump – this giddy is fear.

Other clouds climb upon themselves, hoisted up by this unseen shield, pushed up faster by the wind, and we run with even more giddy down and away. And sometimes we cannot tell for sure, we are hurried into the valley amongst even stands of trees or rolling hills only to watch a beautiful day unfold; the wind may have torn through an imposter and made a tall (but weak) cloud fold over on itself and dissipate.

Only rarely the sky will boil, rolling over, the same as in a cooking pot. It is deciding it seems, waiting to spit into something; an

alchemy that makes it more than floating water, but angry and biting. I saw this once as a teenager. I had thought, or thought little at all (more than thoughts?); I had felt something when I was a teenager, and I would shout up (with my body I suppose because I did not speak much); I didn't make an audible sound but I think it may have been deafening: the gesture was imposing or the presence; I stood taller than I was, upon the manure wagon that I was spreading in the fields; and this as the sky boiled. Just as we giggle now, I stood taller and cried up and hoisted a pitchfork high to invite all that I feared. I was never struck. Now on this trip I'll pass on the effort to be struck; I did pass on the effort. We have stayed in the valleys, and as it seems now: for good reason.

Hiding in Plain Sight

They were surprised that we *found* them. At first many of them were upset, maybe even disillusioned – so fragile that state of trust and faith (at least for some), but just as easy to reel back in again.

They are the “Neophytes” (as they have been dubbed and call themselves); students of sorts, but the word “student” is inundated with too many assumptions and images.

“The Neophyte has an *urge*, this *desire*. The Neophyte does not know what they do not

know, but they are inexplicably drawn to a *Guide* such that they may meet the *Gracious Beast*,” the Guru told us. “We are not hiding here. Yes, every day others walk by and cannot see us or this *Sacred Space* that we live in, but it is not because we cower in shadows, rather *they* will not look at what is in front of them.” And to us, “how did you find us?”

“Well...” I begin.

“The smell,” Nate says abruptly.

“Yes the smell,” Tom agrees.

“Food,” Brandon clarifies.

“Yes, we are all pretty hungry,” John, “the food smelled really great,” he goes on as if for Donald.

And I saw a beautiful girl pushing her way through the brush, Jimmy keeps these thoughts to himself, but that was the true reason we made our way to their kitchen.

It is difficult to read the Guru’s expression. He’s not stone cold, nor does he admit much with his eyes. He could be reading our minds or just as easily be completely unaware of the world about him. “Although they were not found in the ordained *gathering* they have come to us here on their own. This proves that they can *see* at the very least.”

“What of the *trials* we all endured to be here?” One Neophyte shouts out from the masses. There are fifty or more people gathered

here in this clearing. The trees and brush are dense at the edges and the ground slopes down from these natural walls forming an amphitheater of sorts. The guru uses the stump of an enormous oak as a pedestal to address his followers. Looking more closely we begin to see small lights dressing the canopy branches, paper lanterns marking trails from this space to the kitchen, to the *caves*, to the bathrooms, and to the ridge pinnacle with the best vistas of the world below. Day and night blooming annuals line the edges of each space, clearly landscaped – clear to us, having seen the woods and how *she* grows. I could see how others would not notice. All these adornments might go undetected, simply part of this fantastic place in the woods.

As for hiding in plain view, I later came to understand this as a two-fold “trick”. Not a trick in the sense that its deception is meant to be harmful. A trick in that a magic was attained by manipulating certain conditions of the human mind.

First: *likelihood*. We are far off the main trail, and almost no one hikes off the trails in this forest. The attention to Leave No Trace principles is almost outlandishly obeyed in these parts. It is also the week of the garlic festival and the county fair; most of the locals were at these events.

The second bit of magic to this illusion comes by way of a simple idea: *belief is form*. The church of belief is powerful here, amongst fifty believers fully immersed by the *trials* they endured – and the flora and fauna are no better(!) they are always so willing to entertain the fancies of a person's suggestion.

Of the *trials*, from what I gathered, it begins with a party made up of the Neophyte's friends and family; next an evening of public speaking where Neophytes speak of who they are in the world and what they seek to change; then a sudden tearing out from their beds in the evening and being left in the woods with *nothing* but a sleeping bag, tent, loaf of bread, box of matches, and a notebook. "We didn't even have a pillow," I heard one of them recount; finally, with a song at sunrise they are dressed in new white linen gowns and a walk to this *Sacred Place* in the forest.

I think the Guru was aware of how soft this *trial* is. He knew better than to ask us of our travels in front of his congregation. I don't mean to sound smug, I agree that it is not a contest of whom can suffer more. The depth of suffering does not denote value.

"It is better," he says, "we bring those from the city here to the forest, if even for a weekend, some sampling, any touching of a

spiritual practice. The world is passing by so quickly, rushing to its own destruction.”

He says this to Nate, John and myself. We sat with him to make “arrangements”. He was firm that we had to *pay* for our time learning from him. Of course none of us have money and we said so. And it has been months since we have given one thing for another, even to each other. When I take from Brandon I am not inclined or expected to return a favor or an object.

“Money is only a tool. Do not give it the power of *harm*. You do not have money, but you can give something else in exchange for the lessons. Without payment you cannot value what you learn.”

I take this to heart and try to learn from it, as do John and Nate. Brandon and Jim have stayed in the woods mostly. They emerge from time to time to make jokes with us at meals, or sit in trees and watch from above, but mostly they do their own thing.

“What of friendship, or love?” I ask John and Nate sitting on our own. “Do we only value those things if we give to them also?” We argue about that. It is easy to see how that might be; an economist might even be able to offer a monetary value for each.

"What about the forest?" Jim calls down from above. "What do we give the forest? I love this place with all my heart!"

"Maybe you should consider giving to the forest when you take from it each day." The Guru suggests when we return to him with our questions. "What do you do each time you take one of her daughters: the fawn, the fish, or the hare?"

"Sometimes I've let the deer eat the moss from my back."

"You are growing moss on your coat?" A Neophyte chimes in, perplexed.

"No, on my back."

A dozen queer looks.

"I'd show you, but they have all been eaten. It'll take days to grow back."

Disbelief from the crowd. Is the Guru laughing?

From the tree above, "today I ate the leg of a deer. And then we grew it back and I grew long grass amongst my hair so he could also eat and be nourished. Both of us soaked the heat from the sun and drank the water that melted from the snow capped mountains. And the snow capped mountains called a storm to frighten us, but it was laughing the whole time." Brandon calls down. Two Neophytes reach for their sticks, stick to their stomachs, which is maybe the first real fear they have felt in their lives.

I explain: "I left town largely because of this idea that all things should cost something, and equally that we *should* be compensated for anything that we do. I am not sure that we *deserve* anything. But I agree that we live in the forest and we should give to her. We should give her more than we take everyday, and so we want to give you the skins from the first animals we killed in this forest. We want to give you these things because they're warm; because you seem like you'd respect their deaths; and because we want to learn from you. We have stopped killing though. I think that is important to know."

The Guru just watches us with those eyes that tell me little. I am skeptical, and wonder if my words are too insincere, does he see through them? Nate sees only goodness in the eyes of the Guru. John is still weighing in.

Authenticity

The Guru chose a small mountain with several deep caves in the forest and the amphitheater to stage his workshop. He says that here it is easier to feel that we are "complete", away from the "distractions". I remember some of the "distractions" I think he is referring to. But I don't see how being away from things make us more "complete". These caves aren't any different than any other place.

John reminds me that we left the town ourselves and that Donald went to a cave straight away (both examples of how we've attributed value to space).

I make my way through the cave with the blankets and pillow I have been given. There is a path of candles leading to my mattress. Incense burns amongst my cave-mates and their droning sitars and tanpuras. I do love Indian Classical music, and I miss the concerts I would attend or the records I would play, but...

"He isn't white," one Neophyte says to another.

The other replies, "I think he is white, but really tan, and he has been trained by many indigenous healers. He lives both here in the forest as well as in the city and so he is bound to the *wild* and the *civil*. He knows the animals by name and the plants."

And investment banking I think (cynical).

"He knows many *helpers* and has his ancestors and his own trials that have allowed him to find truth and enlightenment. He lives the boundary between worlds, which is much needed with this sick world."

"I am nervous about the ceremony tonight."

"Don't worry, it is safe."

"I know, but how can we be sure? There is so much darkness that people have put on me."

"Your helpers will be with you."

"My spirit guide was a wild horse! It was terrifying when I first saw him. And tonight I will have to talk to him and tame him."

"No, you won't tame him. But he will never hurt you, and he will keep you from being hurt. You are protected."

"My brother did a ceremony in New York City and went crazy for two years."

"His shaman was not authentic."

"How do we know any of this is true?"

"Because what I've seen in a vision is the same as the others around me. We have a shared experience. And when we go back again, we have the same results. It is consistent." He goes on to describe how the Guru's technique is the same as the "most authentic" traditions from South America, Hawaii, Alaska, Russia, Norway, Zimbabwe, India, and New Guinea.

"But my brother's Shaman was from the Peruvian Amazon."

"There are so many men capitalizing on their own culture: snake-oil salesmen! I have seen his rattle dance, it is not authentic. And I've seen him smoking cigarettes."

I can't listen to anymore, not without chiming in "have you seen Brandon?"

"Who is Brandon?" They both reply.

"Our friend. The bear."

"The one wearing the bear skin?" They agree that he is troubling.

I make no attempt to assure them that he will never hurt them. "He's not wearing a bear's skin."

"What do you mean?"

"He didn't survive his fight with the Bear."

"..."

"Hey," John calls to me.

"What do you mean?" The Neophytes want more. The fear inspires an infectious curiosity, like a ghost story.

I start to smile.

"Nothing important," John says interrupting me, "Brandon killed the bear. He wears the skin because he feels guilty for killing the poor thing." He pulls me out of the cave.

"You know that isn't true."

[Brandon killed the bear. *We know this because he is wearing the bear's skin.*

But we all know that the bear killed Brandon and we are traveling with a bear now.

It's better than the Wildman that Brandon was.

Anyhow, Brandon has become the bear's power animal and this is better for the thing, because it has made him quite a bit smarter.

Brandon was pretty smart.]

"It is debatable. Brandon killed the bear, the bear killed Brandon, neither really matters."

"You're right, neither matters."

"But Nate and I want to stay here a while, and scaring the Neophytes will not make us welcome."

"Maybe they should be scared. And telling them that they cannot be hurt by their spirit guide is insane."

"Maybe they won't be."

"And just because the world is moving a mile a minute do you really think we should inoculate as many people with as much spirituality as possible? 'Make it quick!' Do you think that is best?"

"Maybe. Probably not."

"He asked me 'how can you learn when your cup already overflows.' *Let it overflow! Let it overflow and the new will push the old out and I will always be full!* I mean, I tried to take that to heart, but should I really be such an empty vessel? Is nothing that I bring to the table worth something already?"

"He said the same to me."

"What?"

"And to Nate."

"What a load of shit!"

"Nate is taking it to heart."

"Well, I hate that cookie cutter plastic garbage!"

"I get that but –"

"I mean is an hour of yoga really a spiritual practice? Will attending Karate class 3 times a week teach you to master the art, or yourself? 'Hurry the process for the masses that are all in a hurry.' 'It took a lot of dedication to become a master. I've been doing it for five years!' (sarcasm). Or 'it may not be complete, but it is better than nothing, no?'

- ☒ Meditate
- ☒ Stretch
- ☒ Act of kindness
- ☐ Run
- ☐ Eat vegetables

Checked off, then it is done for the day.

The world hurries by, shouldn't I slow down instead? "What about *real* dedication and discipline? And is that hour '*better than nothing*' or is it covering a wound (out of mind out of sight, but festering)? Comfort, convenience, and a frictionless life makes a person selfish and boring. John, we've been walking up and over the mountains rather than around them. Is that frivolous? Am I just making up for the guilt of years of cable television and microwaved dinners?"

"We don't know anything. These Neophytes toss around this word "authentic", wanting it to be a set thing. Don't fall into the same trap. I don't know if this Guru is the real deal or a total charlatan. I don't really care, even if he's lying through his teeth, there's a lot of

interesting things going on. And even if he's reading from a script, he still might be saying things worth thinking about. Jimmy is chasing another girl and happy for it. Nate is really engaged and looking deep. I don't know where Tom is. This place is beautiful, a little too comfortable, but I am excited about the ceremony tonight. It might be really amazing. It doesn't matter if it's all fake. What's real?"

I agree to behave. John brings me to a small stick and leaf shelter he built me so that I needn't sleep with the others in the caves. It is better for my back than the down mattress.

Drawings: cloud formations; growing moss and grass from your body; making magickal spaces.

6

Guru in the Woods

Might watching closely be enough to unlock what radar, satellite, and balloons have collected and analyzed meticulously, but with only so much accuracy?

What a mess! Let me write again. The Austrian 'folk-hero'/lumberjack Victor Schauburger stared at water deep in the woods,

maybe with an openness that allowed for seemingly magical insight; maybe we could also feel and see and remember until the mysteries of the weather begin to unlock or show themselves? I have often noticed the changing seasons, by the smell of spring that I swore was tropical oceans, or of autumn, the deep decay of leaves and dirt and dust and rain.

Days Before

We gathered in the *amphitheater* for a group meditation and lecture from the Guru. This happened nearly everyday: everyday we sat for a group meditation, and nearly everyday the Guru broke the silence a few hours in to deliver a *sermon* (I am sure he would not give it that title).

The Guru's words always came at this particular juncture; not a point that could be measured easily by hours or minutes, but after we had sat comfortably, battled the thoughts that came in the mind, remembered not to battle at all, made efforts to let go, had them wander back in again, let them go again like the fine sands in a dry desert, then felt an aching in the body, the back or side, or strange places like the arch of a foot or in the forearms, and by adjusting the posture slightly the pains began vanishing, the thoughts returned, some frustration mounted (sometimes), still we'd let go and focus on the breath.

And by this point there would be some unity in the *gathering*, for the whole of us, as quietly as we'd inhale and exhale, we'd breath together. This really shakes the space! You can see the air moving, in and out through the clearing, not by strong winds, or by moving leaves, nothing cinematic, still you can *see* the air moving; the trees and brush and moss follow suit and we see the whole place pumping like a lung and a heart.

It was at this time that the Guru would break the silence:

"This is a world of pain, the suffering will end when you let it go."

With all our attention, and the unquestioning devotion of his disciples the clearing swayed with each syllable he spoke. I could feel each Neophyte relax. A tremendous sigh, everyone letting go of a buried pain, whether they had pain to begin with or not. Hell, I felt it too. An image popped into my mind, a closing door, and then the entire house vanished, I had let go.

"We recognize that we are all in pain, and from where the pain has come. It is beautiful, the clarity it brings, the purification, the release in simply knowing. Now that you have seen the pain, you may let it go, it does not define you."

Trauma is necessary but lingering there is not growth either. Would I give this one moment

so much attention? Stuck looking for any insignificant pain that I might indulge for revelation again. I'd idolize the struggle, and idolize the wounded. I'd accuse the strong, sure that they are actually weak or liars. I had thought of pain before.

"We are the Spirit, but divided within souls within bodies. Escape this dual thinking: this male and female; this fact and fiction; our religion and science; the lion, lamb, other, and self; by letting go of these illusions, these divisions, we will become free, free to live the only truth. Coexisting with everything else in nature. We are not separate; we are already complete."

"Complete! Complete!" They cry as they sway by his word. I may have cried out 'complete' a few times myself. Or at least mouthed the syllables. But here I am now thinking something else:

Sure, break down the illusion of divisions. Not only the dualistic pairs, but every reductive category that we create. But even in defining what is *whole* and *complete*, we ignore and dismiss the painful, the violent, the angry, the jealous, the ugly. I of course try not to indulge these things. But they are a part of the whole! Are they not? Saying that they are not *true* and not *love* themselves divides. Then there *is* hierarchy, just as there is not. It is not just about

sharing, but taking away as well. The Gracious Beast includes all the painful and destructive, entangled with the lovely.

When I close my eyes I still feel and see. I might be complete, but only when I think that *nothing* is also complete; or that we are complete also in nothingness. Some void; I'll take *comfort* in the unknown. Must we be comfortable at all?

In grade school it was obvious that *ends do not justify means*. How then can we now, by simply calling something "right" forever be absolved of the pains it carries? I am accountable for all the harm and all the good in every choice I've made. And all that occurs during the process is as valuable as the moments we call "complete".

We've set out and we know that we won't reach the destination. I've wondered how long it'll be before I arrive at anything at all? It has only been months. What a misleading ambition! I know it, but I'll use it to push along, as if anything could be attained, trodding along in that direction despite *reason*.

I am not only suspicious of the figure who has arrived (at a terminal degree, an unsurpassable position, a definitive expertise), I am also suspicious of the 'truth' they wield like a sword or suit of armor: rigid, unyielding, these "*answers*," the "*right way*." I wonder: how is he perceived? How does he perceive himself? How

does he perceive his answers? How are those answers projected? I worry for the people who journey their own way, *writhing* in the mud, or at a *maddening mundane* pace; that the men and women who *know best* might tell them they have to live another way, because they have found the *best way*.

I think I'll try the unpleasant and slow, even the boring. Sometimes the theatrical and obviously powerful I suppose, if I am so inclined.

Ceremony

The *ceremony* began, at least for myself, with a ringing bell outside my debris hut. I heard the distinct, hand crafted brass chime just above my head as I was catching a last early evening dream, during a nap (hoping to save my energy before this whole to-do). Taking no more than a few moments to collect myself before really waking up, I rolled to my back and found nothing. But then another, now distant shake of the ornament made me spring up enough to pop my head out to just barely catch a glimpse of the feet of some gnomish boy scuttle through the brush and into the forest. Looking the other way I saw Nate already adorned in long thorned roses and doves (living), who were covering him with droppings as they would continue to do throughout the night. Looking back, towards the *path* again, where the gnome had vanished was

John looking at me, his head was also sticking out from his leaf and mulch bed.

From what I gathered later, the Neophytes were given lengthy tasks to prepare for this event. Hand drawn letters were sent to each of them in secret, even siblings, lovers, and business partners kept the receipt of the event secret from each other, despite now being in each other's company. I would have been relieved to find my friends after keeping such a long secret from them. I don't remember seeing relief on any of the Neophytes' faces. Perhaps we had arrived after the sentiment had passed?

These secret letters detailed descriptions of a character they were to learn and embody. The letters even outlined techniques of discovering the living-character through nightly acting techniques and visualizations that the Neophytes also had to practice/preform in secret. The letters contained these instructions as well as a map that described the arc of the said character over the year (which included this *ceremony*).

The map was unique to each character and thus to each Neophyte. One was a thousand words put together with no spaces and chosen perfectly so that a dozen translations could be pulled out from the text, and if you removed certain letters, entirely new messages would be derived. Another was simple pictograms, but

each cut out and mixed in no particular order. The Neophyte who received this one put the images in front of his new born child while his wife was asleep on the porch and let the baby move the images around until she was pleased. Another map was assembled by '0's and '1's, and '2's, which threw the whole thing off completely. Seemingly the most straight forward was the small piece of notebook paper with a series of graphs and waves drawn in pencil; even the day of the ceremony the Neophyte who received this was not entirely sure if this was the map or his daughter's school work.

Despite the trouble of the maps, the Neophytes followed the instructions, embodied their characters through the techniques outlined in the letter (often with their own researched or invented techniques as well), and lived out the arc enigmatically outlined by the maps throughout their *trials* and all the workshops, lectures, and *gatherings* thus offered by the Guru.

And tonight was a culmination, so to speak, of these efforts. "So to speak" because some interpreted maps had already peaked, and this *ceremony* was for them a *decline* in their *personal* progressions.

As I made my way from my debris hut to the clearing of the amphitheater I began noticing surprising movements from the woods. There were the animals as usual, but moving unusually,

moving either in the same direction as me, or stopping to watch or to move away deliberately, or acting not much like they should: nothing dramatic, but deer resting their front hooves against tree trunks, or rabbits balancing on their tails with all four paws in the air.

The Neophytes were in their white linens as before, and of course Nate was in roses and doves as I had said before. John walked with me for a short while before being pulled into the forest by Jim and Brandon and then further along by a few Neophytes once those two returned to the canopy above.

Soon enough I was by myself: a noticeable contrast to all the commotion before. The mysterious quiet made for predictably unsettling moment. I've come to adore that sort of "witches hour", but it did not last. I stood for maybe an hour, not very long at all before the moment was abruptly broken by my reflection – or a hundred reflections of myself.

Oh my! I was startled, before realizing they were all me.

What a thing I've become I thought in reaction.

It was not that these images of myself were from hundreds of mirrors wrapped around the skin of a broad man who blocked my path that I reacted. It was that I hadn't seen myself in so long and I thought, *what a thing I've become*.

I stepped to the right, and he mirrored me (of course) stepping to his left. I did away with stepping to the left for surely he would mirror that so I stepped straight forward curious to see whether he would step back or straight towards me. Toe to toe. The smile that came to my lips showed through the dirt and beard I've grown. And my mirror gave the same smile, staring all the while.

I step back, I step back. I step back again, I step back again. I run back, I run back.

"I'll gladly destroy myself!" We cry out as we charge each other with every ounce.

I want to see. I want to see if he will. Will he be like me completely? Will he disappoint and flinch or hesitate?

We do not, but he is made of glass and is nothing but shards as I continue forward, along this path that never seemed so long before.

And now I am by a river. It is deep and too wide to leap; still there is almost no current; still it is terrifically cold! I don't make a fuss over this thing, and continue through and on, never worrying about how I might make my way, just making my way without hesitation. Frozen now; so long as I continue I am warm enough.

Then I am in the forest and I am not sure where I am at all, so I try walking beyond reason, also attempting to keep uncertainty from imparting hesitation. *Continue walking and you*

will either arrive or be further away. Either way I'm fine. But then the hole in the ground is here, which is my way into the cave, and I recognize these woods for their foreboding and sense of *uneasy*. And just before the hole with the stairs leading down there is a terrifically heavy wooden beam. *Ok, I'll carry the beam.*

So the beam is on my back and I call down to my jackal who is likely down in the hole and I tell him we'll touch base later. And I make my way dragging this horrible weight until I am beyond exhaustion, until I am beyond imagining that this is the correct thing to do, or even the intended behavior, I drag until I am certain that it is impossible, and I sit and have *given up*. But of course I stand up, and laughing at the fool that is myself I keep dragging the bear. And I find that I can lift it and run along through the woods with it, the trees parting as I go, and it is never lighter, or more believable. Not even when I find John (and he is carrying ropes) and five others come out with beams and one with buckets of nails and another with cloth.

We carve the lot together, building a monstrosity to cross this lake of frozen chunks and glacial shards. There isn't a moon, just the stars upon the alpine lake, and with frigid hands we paddle out. *If Jim were here he could swim us out!* I laugh to myself, and John knows what I am laughing about.

It has been long enough for the sun to rise. It seems like the coldest time of day. And I can hear the winds begin to push down from the peaks surrounding. *Maybe it is nearly morning?*

I ease up, still paddling to move: my body and share of boat. But I take to gazing up: the crisp and clear, and the uncountable stars set up against the dusting of more distant stars. I am glad this has become familiar, not dull, never without awe or *terror* (something like terror).

Patches of pink or purple, no, no. Naming colors does it wrong; leading you to believe that I saw cartoonish flashes of light (not to discredit the northern lights) this is not what I saw; what I saw was infinitely more subtle, and I wondered if it was only an anomaly for my eyes; almost unnoticeable movements of the subtlest tones dancing about as I drifted.

I would have been convinced that it was for me alone had I not noticed one of the Guru's disciples: a mousy girl, who had been carrying a beam herself. She was clearly seeing the same thing or something equally brilliant in the sky for her smile. I could tell even in the dark. And with another glance, despite the pitch black, the trees and mountain shadows, and the stretch of boat between us I understood what she *said*.

Respect

We fell asleep. ("We": all of us on the boat.) We woke by fires and animals and song (good songs) and friends (of course good – great!). We were on an island (?) I think. The surrounding canopy was so thick that I could not see out. It was much like the amphitheater, but clearly another place. The stars were as still as they were on the boat, with the sparks from a tremendous fire lit up within them. Each person and animal was something else entirely: beautiful through and through. I wept and laughed and felt nothing but the bursting turning, not only in me, but *through* me and *all*.

I won't go on about the island. It was the *arrival*. And from here there were things that could be called celebrations. Calling it a *party* is not really fair, but I don't know how else to write it.

In an equally inadequate attempt I'll note that I have never felt *closer* to anyone else in my life. Nor do I feel that I ever will. And in writing 'closer' in italics, I am indicating that this word is not correct. I could not be *closer*, I *was*, more than I have ever been myself. I have never felt more *complete*, more *honest*.

And here, with the Guru, he became something different. No Sermon, no pedestal, no gathering of Neophytes echoing his words. He stood quietly in the shadows, only the slightest flicker of light on his strong nose and bushy

eyebrows. I don't think anyone saw him there. Not John, or Nate, or the Neophytes. No one was looking for him either.

I've never respected a man, a woman, a beast, for their achievements, their degrees, how well they accomplish tasks, or speak, not even by their experiences, how centered they appear, how knowledgeable they are, the skills they've mastered, the years they've endured, the hardships they've over come; I am sometimes fooled by a calm wisdom, and attracted by kindness; and for my own interest I am so very proud of a woman or man or beast who might do what they think is correct despite paralyzing fear; the one I loved, she was so terribly afraid but she would push through: for this she is incredibly brave.

For my own interest I am also drawn to those who act from their heart, but not self-righteously, or on a moral high-ground, or because they must inundate the world with truth, but because they are inspired, and watch carefully and do, not for an ends, but for the action itself. No induction into a secret order, especially not *fame*, nor the company of famous, inspire me to value or respect; and I certainly care nothing for the dropping of names and big words, better quote the poodle husky mix at the corner house, or the drunk who lives in a barrel, than some '*brilliant*'.

But to see a man, woman, and beast again when they have nothing, no guards to keep: maybe the calm that comes with staring at the fire(?); what is in the crackling flames, glowing embers, and whirling and puffing smoke(?); it is only this love between souls that has mattered to me – there is *us* and for *me* nothing else matters, perhaps not even these things. The Guru had my heart in this moment, and I learned so much from him.

Belief is Form

I should stop before I embarrass myself completely.

Before that, I need ruin one more thought, because I saw it.

It convinced me some of *truth*: the tree who spoke, the walls that gave, the fire that would not burn flesh, the heart that could give endlessly.

It was *proven* to me that Belief is Form; that the entirety of *truth* and *experience* comes from Belief. Here with the Guru and his Neophytes in the woods with only the agreeable animals and trees and shrubs, the bending of the assumed was easy. By this *church* (congregation) built up by a year of preparation and *wanting*, of tasks and gatherings and trials.

Every assumption, every object, every thought, every sense, everything called matter

and physical, is formed by the built upon, by millions of years of belief. Even time, which we give substance, is built by belief. Every person before they are born assumes they will be.

To change *fact*, it is more than thinking you believe something else. But through a church strong enough we can bend reality. Even if it is momentary. Even if it lasts this one night, and tomorrow we'll pack up again to return to offices, and mills, and for *us* the trails we are walking. Even if the experience means nothing to us tomorrow.

Leaving, take a moment

As difficult as it was to explain the *party*, it would be infinitely more difficult to explain why we are leaving. The Guru said nothing. I did not see him again since watching him stare into the flames. And the Neophytes, even the one's who stayed in the caves to live, however much longer, none of them stopped us, or even gave us parting gifts or anything.

Still I wonder if the reader of this will wonder? Maybe I am *grounding*? Doubting it myself? I'll regress to a frustrated tone, defense, and critique. I am sorry for the reader, and for myself.

I am done with answers! Bring mysteries! The self-assured tone demanded of writers and philosophers has made them dull and unhelpful. Don't think for a second that

you or I know a thing either. I have said that belief is form, and that a church of thought makes an imagination more material than a fact. It is tidy and always works, and though I have seen it countless times now, I have to wonder what use is another dogma? But I am not interested in long bouts where I break down the other and prove myself so brilliant.

There are places, there are people who listen to their children and learn something from them, just as they listen to the madman or to the old one who mumbles or the young woman who appears old because her teeth are falling out and her mind is gone from the drugs. Maybe I wouldn't be able to tell you where this place is, but does that matter?

All of it discounts something else, and nothing hopes to include everything that is. For as true as what I say to you is to me, to another it is not. But there is no reason for one to be wrong but to invent security. It is terrifying to live in a world without proof, without certainty. Truth makes us safe. But no one is safe, there is no truth that can protect you. Even abandoning all of it, and calling it suffering; clawing to transcend. Escape! Escape! Where to?

7

We've found ourselves in a real adventurers Refugio. After being away for so long, it comes with mixed feelings to hear the

pop-radio and to drink beers or eat 'properly' cooked meals.

And seeing women! Not just women, men and women who care something for their appearance (my standards) even if, in the eyes of the civil they are disheveled or unclean; but compared to us...

Never mind that, after weeks of winter, with frost bitten hands and toes, it is nice to have the warmth, and strange, but pleasant, to have others wait on you some.

The culture is odd. Everyone speaking big, going for something, proud already: by just their posturing. I've felt like I've been bragging even though I am only recounting the casual events of the year, or when I suggest where I might be heading, and with what supplies – or lack of which supplies.

There are the sponsored adventurers and the independently wealthy, but no one cares all too much, and everyone looks like a dirt bag even if they also look made up to be attractive.

I doubt we look like much. In fact I am sure that we appear as savage as they come. Make someone reach for their fancy gun, thinking we are closer to a bear than human.

The strangest is how this place sits amongst the locals. This hotel, in the midst of straw and stick huts. The specialized tourist, not

the best kind, never spending much, besides in moments of excess and revealing.

Then they talk again about the adventure they are launching off to in the night hours of morning. And they laugh at the bad choices they are about to make for weather or their own skills. And we all laugh too though they might not come back alive, and everyone knows and laughs. But in the middle night it will feel like a swarm in the chest, and they hope for some severe fever and vomiting that might excuse them from their boasting.

Is the fever to protect or hold back? The ego fears he will destroy himself. You can tell, from the stink of stress. But then I wonder again why we are here. The urge? I haven't thought much beyond that. A lifestyle? But when it is all made a vacation or a sport, separate from life, leisure, we are the gentlemen class. There is no sense trying to convince *them* that our approach is genuine, whether supported by funds or living off the land, everyone is a dirt bag, everyone is privileged, and everyone is at the mercy. What is genuine? One view selected for another. In this we are privileged.

Tomorrow I'll go as well. Baptism by fire: tomorrow I'll see what I'm made of. I already know that I haven't packed enough food, but I've walked with my pack and I cannot bear the

weight. Instead I'll carry what I am used to; I have enough to eat lightly for at least 6 days. Enough to cross the frozen desert? No. Don't worry – ease into the arms. Are you having fun? Well I'm not laughing out loud, but I am smiling and I experience awe that I can enjoy by myself, and I am not wishing anyone were here with me save that I do enjoy and love the company of my friends.

A week gone by

Tomorrow I'll decide whether I continue or turn back. If this shelter works I think I'll keep going. It is difficult now, beyond the tree line. Today is the first day I've had a moment's concern with dying. I've only been afraid of how I live and what may come my way, but today I am thinking of death and foolishly I feel fear.

Having managed a shelter

I am assuming it is tomorrow; it could very well still be today. I don't know the difference between the two. I don't know the date. I am having doubts. My unyielding optimism is yielding. I am only writing right now to live until morning. You could fall asleep without issue, and that is your fear. You used to brag that you could be asleep in moments and you would show people, but there was no way to really convince anyone. I believed you, even when you claimed to have fallen asleep standing

up, legs locked like a horse, your back resting gently against a wall. The best stories, though the scariest, were those in which you closed your eyes for a moment while driving and opened them again finding yourself five miles further, having taken the proper exit, riding the on-ramp for the city bridge. Or returning home, you felt that unbearable need to sleep so you began shouting at yourself. You were in a field, walking about, and you heard a distant sound. You strained to listen, and it did sound familiar: "Hey! Hey! Wake the hell up! Stay awake!" And you woke up to your own voice screaming at you. It was impressive that you could stay in lane amongst the traffic, but I was glad that you decided from then on you would always pull over for a nap when overcome, no matter how close to home you had come. I fear if I were to use my god given abilities to sleep under any condition I would not wake up this time. Doubts. I suppose I lack some will; thinking of cafes and other warm places with soft lighting and good company, friends and even (and of course) *doomed* romance (still a boy).

The fidgeting. Would passing notes make the time that passes less enduring and more pleasant? In a loud room, it is better than straining the voice to only misunderstand and be misunderstood – and only the weak and forced passing of words. In a note a certain depth or at

least tone is certain – and for that a sense of meaning.

Now the curling of toes and bending of knees and ankles. In a letter my shaking voice hides and the only fear revealed comes with the actual/physical passing of the letter itself. I needn't muster more than a second of confidence and can even fluff that if the note is drafted with considerable beauty, open, and (mind you) reserve!

So how then have I found myself, through this considerable wandering, passing notes and pressed flowers?

Pressed flowers too!?

With my heart in throat and sweat from palms smudging ink. Even I succumb to the comforts, but I fool myself with the notion that I have reached some other depth, because of beauty and style.

I went to 'bed' and could not get warm. This shelter, beyond trees, has worked well – no, it hasn't. And I can't get warm. So I took off most of my clothes, they being mostly damp. I got warm, but then I couldn't breathe. I couldn't breathe and then my sleeping bag got wet. Then I couldn't get warm and I was beginning to feel nausea. I considered packing up and hiking out into the middle of the night. But I've seen that trick, that is madness trying to injure me, and I am almost comfortable here.

So I am here with no watch, no idea of how close I am to morning. We decide to eat and drink and write until first light; though it is hard to see at night, only by the setting moon.

Meanwhile my tent is shrinking and my neck is kinked. It is sleeting and freezing raining and my shelter is garbage! Half of my sleep pad has been swallowed by frozen water.

In the distance (just across the glacial lake) two dogs have not stopped barking since I tried to go to bed. I wonder if they can hear and smell this someone here (me) who is not right. I have wanted to be *right* by dogs, always. These dogs are strange. Or I am not myself.

As I was trying to breathe, deciding to leave or to stay, I start in again, these rants with God (?); typical when I am lost and afraid – “afraid?” I began with this dumb question: *why am I here?* Why here, in this place in particular? Does it have meaning? All things do. But it is frivolous for sure. All things might be. In the village below, those in the Refugio with the \$5 massage and \$1 beers. This travel bug – where has it brought me?

How did I forget? So many times last night, banging my head against those rocks! And the one that fell right onto my face!

Why am I here?

It dawns on me that if I am to get any answers I should ask better questions. So I blabber my typical ravings:

“if we are all or one, and this is but an illusion of separateness and suffering

“ ...

“but I cannot embrace the growth of the soul when the soul is not explained” –

*a side note: and I won’t get into this too much as it will probably start freaking me out, and up till now I am going on momentum and *faith*, but since the beginning of this particular excursion I’ve – no to hell with writing about that! I’ll write about that later.

Oh I’ve dreamt a lot of crazy shit while I’ve been dying here: that I am not alone – in a *good* way. In *both* ways. That I was offered breathing options.

So I am asking God a for break. He is cold, so I worked up the energy to sit up, put on a shirt and coat, eat some hard-boiled eggs, then begin looking for my pen. Of course it is lost. I search and search in my collapsing teepee, and give up. I decide my first words in the journal today will be “I’ve lost my pen, so I am writing in pencil.” That is stupid; I had something more clever in mind before. But just then I found it, right under my leg. I accept this as a small break gifted by the Divine. That and the fact that I am not upset. I am still enjoying myself and I am hardly

disappointed that I will retreat tomorrow. A wise adventurer has to know when it is appropriate to retreat. No, not retreat; there is another word for it that sounds more dignified. Am I glad I am here, in this country, or in this wet tarp pressing against my back? Of course. Sure I am. When daylight comes I expect something of a challenging day. Still I only have the hot springs in mind.

Sorry for swearing at you and the Mountain so many times. It was just personal motivation to stay conscious, the same as cursing at myself.

I just turned off my headlamp to see the condition of the night: it is night. In fact, that is good, the dogs stopped barking – this means it is truly night and not just after dusk. When the dogs start barking again I'll know it'll be morning.

Still night. Of the precipitation: a foot of shitty heavy snow! Good luck finding the trail in the morning! Ha! Ha! Hell.

I suppose there is no option than to turn back. It'll be hard enough finding my way across terrain I have already seen let alone pressing on through the unexplored. Pressing forward, the elevation would step up another thousand meters.

Percy? Am I failing my king? Ha ha ha.
Ok...

Ok. I stopped for a moment. That same unspeakable (unwritable) fear. This childhood fear. I'll write about it now. Get this ridiculous thing out in the open!

It is not that I do not believe in what I am afraid of. I surely do. I simply don't think I should be afraid –

Just now!

It was the sound of the heavy snow rolling off my tarp and collapsing into the gullies of water surrounding me. Each turn and place. The folding and resting of the blanket upon my legs and chest. It is the weight upon the legs and chest. The chest especially when my head is heavy upon my pile of jackets made a pillow. The legs when I try to stand or now again when I am laid down.

There now! I wondered and began, the “why's”, as to frights and unusual dreams; so terrifying when I am awake, but no worries when asleep? In dream there is some narcotic muting my fear. Here, half awake, I feel every ounce a pound, and all that weight upon my chest! Now indulging in the horrifying willingness – that I should suddenly choose to face these waking nightmares; obviously they are more than dreams, never doubted once since I was a child, but brushed off as if nothing more in the company of my friends. This embrace of fear and I am held by some darker sleep

paralysis, that devil taking all my air! I sink until I can bear it no longer, and only have to move to change the thing. Twice the man to remain absolutely still.

If I am wrong, I will find my way again someday? Why die foolishly? Why live foolishly? What is home and heart?

I'm so tired. I am going to try out some sleep. Don't worry. I'll wake up, and live out the next century!

I Slept. Awoke. And bitch! – still dark! I've slept three cycles – no, maybe three winks. But I slept and got up and went pee and got up and ate two eggs and heard the birds calling. It is a blizzard outside. Come on sun! Come on sun! Everything is wet, that just means I can't stop till I'm back. Glad I brought this down coat after all. Can't stop thinking about her. It never stops. Don't' know why.

When I began this journal I stated "I got fired from my job and my wife left me." I thought it was funny to write. This kitsch turn of events, and the blunt delivery. To be more truthful: I fired my job and convinced my wife to leave me.

I worked very hard and though what I did was (in theory) important, the way we approached the thing was somehow wrong. There is something that does not sit well with me and the selling of things. I didn't work retail, but we made things that were sold. And while

thousands of others would give an arm to work for a company such as mine, I couldn't stomach it. I was rewarded again and again, and treated with respect, I received raises, and the employee of the year award, and they paid for time off and travel. But these were the wrong things. The rewards and the product, these were the wrong things. *You privileged bitch.*

What was I doing today that even makes me think of this? Never mind the job. I haven't written about her once. Not this entire journey, save a page torn out here or there, and never really before. She wanted me to write about her. I felt like I couldn't, because I thought something more of her than to fictionalize her. She wasn't some fleeting novelty in my life. And it is not to say that I have not thought of her throughout this trip. I know that half the strength to wander came from her.

She expressed interest in exploring the world (without me) and I knew that was important. Furthermore I had no choice. Interest (urge) must be explored (sought after) or it will fester. The thing that retains the body is the prison. I knew better than to hold on till it became some poison. I loved her too much to kill our love – so we ended it instead. And she was not my wife. She was my girlfriend. But I liked thinking of us as married, and sometimes when I

am low I feel like she left me – because her things are gone – and her too.

Years later I might run into her and her child. But the little beast is a full human being running around with some style, not even the wooble wobble of a less than fully conscious infant to toddler. The thing is a boy – or a girl! And long armed with equally gangly legs; and hands and feet as big as her mothers, closing in on my mitts – though I'd never compare the two. I'd be ashamed to show these claws on the streets, let alone some a domestic home. On the streets I might flash them to the violent man – a warning that these things are not clumsy chunks of meat, but tools, machines and bludgeons!

Why the thoughts of violence? Of weapons and shame? The child! The child.

The child is as old as you have been wild. That thing can lift and throw considerable weight, find and kiss frogs, and cling still to her mother with spindling limbs. And mother is still strong and alive, and beautiful as much as she was always handsome. So am I so old as a beast? Not a baby: I can lift things and find the wild animals also; and *mother* still lets me hold her; I hope to never leave *home*; what place is there but this?

Have I said nothing of this place? *In it*, I am apt to forget, or I take it for granted. No never. This place. It is beautiful. It is endless. It

is a horror! I am both swaddled in strong arms, but left out to die. I am so very lost, and in my own home all the while. This merciful tyrant; I am running out a maze sure of nothing, not even death. Pain perhaps. Perhaps that I am sure of.

Still you have said nothing of this place.

How 2 weeks almost became 4 days became 3 days

How there were 2 of me to keep us company

I woke this morning with another chance to press on. The way back was ominous, dressed in dark clouds; continuing forward on the trail was more or less clear skies... What hides in fair weather(?): snow, altitude, lost; my clothing and supplies are wet; I haven't enough food...

into the storm!

No storm. There were only dark and scary looking clouds. As soon as I started walking into them they began to dissipate. I called the bluff. The dark clouds have already moved where we would have walked.

So we decided to try and follow these 'C' shaped stone walls – and we think they do signify some kind of trail marking. But the first led me to cliffs. I had to down climb some considerable terrain with my heavy pack, snow on half the holds. Then I sledded down the mountain side, tearing up the patches and skin on my backside. Sledding thirty to fifty feet at a

time. Aiming for the large rocks to stop myself before getting so much speed that I would break myself apart. I crossed the river and followed the path I took the day before. By fortune and misfortune there was the snow: treacherous and deep, my boots are not cutting it. But the sheep are kept close to home in this weather – so there are no herding dogs that would bark, chase, and show teeth.

From the top of the hill I search for the narrowest river crossing, the furthest from a house or farm. I pick a spot and sled down a hundred feet. I am not sure why I am so reserved in my writing today. Afraid to brag or describe my excitement and fear? Who would read? If you are reading, I am not writing to inflate my ego. Or I am. But it doesn't matter, the climbing and the sledding have been noteworthy. An ice axe or trekking pole could have been a rudder and brake, but I only have heels and mitts – and it takes skill to use them without turning a controlled slide into a balling tumble. It is awesome! The sledding is scary, and it is awesome!

Not a bad spot: the river, of course is a little wider than I had anticipated. So I throw my water bottle across, which I overthrow into the next stream, and then my pack, which clears and stops abruptly where it lands – that heavy bear of a thing. Then I toss myself!

Jesus! Even gathering my belongings, retrieving this notebook and pen, and writing these things down I am filled still with that – I mean that was the longest jump I have ever made! And over water that would have – possible drowning, hypothermia is likely, the current, I would have made it out I am sure, but with water in lungs and soaked completely. But never mind that. No worries. I have made it across! A jump to be proud of!

Walking along the valley bottom I looked up to the clouds framed by bald and jagged ridges; I have noticed the clouds all these months. The massive blankets lower down, when they fill out into a proper sheet let out a bit of rain for the whole day. When the wind comes up from the South or the South East they often push up taller over the peaks, sometimes forming into towers. From these there is lightning and heavy rain or snow.

Looking again maybe it is when the wind comes from the North and Northwest that the water finally gathers into masses enough to make it to the ground. We see them falling and not touching down especially when it is warmer out. After the North and Northwest winds, the weather settles back again. Usually for much longer than the occasional pause after the South and Southeastern winds.

Miles more hiking, mostly up hill. Pick a spot just ahead, a root or rock or shadow in the snow, follow it (with eyes), pick a new spot, follow it, a new spot – for hours. Come on push on. You're tired? We'll take rest. Then push again.

Lord what a wide sky and layered clouds this country shows! Each peak always pulling clouds about itself selfishly. A blanket to wrap round her head, for us a reason for fear to return. Before it was just the imposing rock itself. Halfway up a cliff I wonder if it is the rest of the mountain above, below, or the clouds that scare me most. Then I wonder if fear is appropriate at all, because I find myself admiring the thing instead: the rock, the peak, and the clouds drift up into those vertical towers that might become black and solid until they come down with rain, hail, or bolts of lightning.

I found another series of 'C' shaped stone structures. At one point I found the trail as well. I continued to follow the 'Cs', high up the mountain. I climb to where the grass is long, and there is no sheep or goat shit. My horrible hand – drawn map, I remember someone saying something about a hard hike up, then a steady descent. So I follow. But I am beginning to think the c's stand for "cliff" or "have courage climber". I'm far from reasonable hiking: Vertical. Above. On a cliff. There's the long meandering knife –

edge ridge, the way I came, and this 200 hundred cliff face, below. Fuck if I walk back those 7 miles and round again! Fuck if I hike a mile along that ridge! I have a short length of webbing. I'll tie it to my pack and lower it between down climbing these stepped ledges.

This works for a bit, but ledges end, so I have to drop the pack – and, well it tumbles past anything that might catch it and keeps going, down the mountain, rolling all the way with parts flying off, there goes the coconut milk, exploding along the rock. Don't let that be your head stupid!

Nice and easy. So I down climb, up climb, side to side climb, tear out chunks of rock climb, hang by a finger climb, hold my breath climb, waterfall climb, mossy wet ledges for hands and feet climb the thickness of one pad (finger) climb, concentrate on breathing, in a shank-broken boot to add flavor. I did really well all in all. I am alive.

I made it down to the boulder fields and followed a sun, dirt, and toil darkened man who was leaving hoof shaped foot prints. We talked briefly, walked together, then went our separate ways.

I came across a kind man and his two children. I remember that he was 33, his daughter had a common American name and his son was only wearing one sandal. This son's big

toe was bleeding – also he had shark teeth. The man offered me lodging in his home village-where I was heading for a soak in the hot springs. I agreed, we walked and talked. He showed me his garden of guinea pigs. He spread some sheep shit, everything is natural he said. He also had some fields of either tobacco or coca. But probably neither. I couldn't quite make out anything he was saying because he wasn't speaking English. But he said the plants were for chewing.

He let me soak first, in the hot springs, to brush the chill off. He sees that my face is pale. He must have, for I could feel that it was. There is a boy from the Refugio, on his horse. A blanket for a saddle. The kind man brings me maps of the world and asks me where I am from. I show him where I have traveled from and to. I hadn't thought much of it but the further I traveled, the hungrier I got, the more exhausted, the more difficult a situation, the more I was convinced that there were two of me. I'd think "I have to stop and eat for him." "I have to stop and rest for him." "I have to keep from sleeping so he won't die in the night." I wonder what would have happened if I had let him? Was that the fail-safe of my ego? Had I pressed on would I have transcended, died, both? He kept me laughing though, and we would have never gone sledding down a mountain otherwise.

This village is made of water. The road is cut with channels converging into rivers, lakes and waterfalls. There are always these sounds. And the hot springs. I haven't thought much about many things. I wonder how long it has been that I have been traveling alone?

(It'll be weeks still before I think oddly about the man leaving foot prints like goat hooves, realizing that we had held a perfect conversation for miles never speaking the same language – or speaking at all?)

8

(*delirious*)

DON'T EXPLAIN IT, SHOW IT

Reminders to myself: treat this like a telling, reveal worlds that I have been to, and do not apologize by calling the place fictitious when you are done. In and out of dream, blurred lines between. The house takes multiple floors; playing between worlds; embrace; and want the weakness; neither is right nor wrong, maybe best(?).

In reading this, begin by putting *such and such* record on, and at *such and such* juncture begin incessantly beating on a drum with the open side of the skin facing your heart.

“the child is chosen and brought up with a view to becoming a shaman; but the first ecstasy is decisive: if no experience supervenes, the clan renounces its candidate. Sometimes the young candidate's behavior determines and hastens his consecration. Thus it may happen that candidates run away to the mountains and remain there seven days or longer, feeding on animals “caught... directly with their teeth” and returning

to the village dirty, bleeding, with torn clothes and hair disheveled, “like wild people.” It is only some ten days later that the candidate begins babbling incoherent words. Then an old shaman cautiously asks him questions; the candidate (more precisely, the “spirit” possessing him) becomes angry, and finally designates the shaman who is to offer the sacrifices to the gods and prepare the ceremony of initiation and consecration.” [don’t tell me if you know]

The birch are thin, but they are plenty. The snow pack is good, easy to walk in, not the chest deep, sometimes neck deep drifts that we’ve dug, clawn, and pushed thrown for miles. When neck deep lift a stick or ax handle and carve away by layers: 6 or 8 inches each pull; cut away to the waist then drag up a buried foot; kick, stomp, down a new platform. Once a stance is managed bring up the second foot and begin the climb higher to *firm* pack (so there is less work); you might stay aloft, upon the crust – until it breaks; it breaks usually all the time, or more often. Now you are buried again to your neck; repeat. You slump, others take the front, it’s their shift now for breaking ground: designation by exhaustion. Move forward maybe a hundred yards an hour? Less? Less.

The snow pack is good, easy to walk; and for this easy travel and perfect temperatures: not so cold to be called bitter, not so warm to elicit sweat, soaking when you move, frozen when you stand, and overtime right for the snow to set up

with stable layers... despite grateful conditions I
am unhappy.

Beyond this *not having fun*, I am not even merry
in the 'misery'.

I am sick. I want none of this. And it doesn't
make me laugh at all!

I am warm and cold (not back and forth) both at
once.

Really cold and really hot at once. Horribly so.

I've felt bad before, and would push on,
laughing at the suffering. Make a joke: "we might
end the day early." Then of course we push
through, a day twice as long, until things become
"enjoyable" or funny at least: in their way.
Maybe a great view of the coming or passing
notch and peaks, or a sunrise that reinspires.
The pain needn't redemption: joy or pleasure as
reward. Sometimes it has this, but this is not
requisite. There is no payment and we'll
continue, laughing often at the pain, or just
wanting to vomit, but not unhappy. Writing, and
reflecting makes me laugh again, we are the
same as the Norwegian men in old stories, and so
the rock carried on your back is a gift. Everyone
knows the hardship is a gift for the role.

But now:

No.

I have been sick. The others dug me a grand snow shelter. There is fresh air and a fire: both! Of course sometimes the fire fills the whole house. I've seen the man in the flames with no concern for the burning and a smile that is not what I was taught about happiness by my mother and father. But I am in the upper room, the *safe* one. I am warm beneath the bear. Between chills and sweat. Jimmy comes in and out to check on me and to keep the fire scalding – that DEVIL! HIDEOUS. HIDEOUS DEVIL, HIDEOUS GROTESQUE!

I
stopped

where I stood. And could stand no longer.
Could do no thing to keep warm, to think; food
nor water. The mansion in distances across
marsh and pond, the same way I had gone
before, and to think of wolves(!); the ones who
would tear me apart if I ever let them catch me.
They aren't coming yet. The others make tea,
and made me drink. I can't hold the cup with
these fingers, or the warm water inside, I haven't
the strength; the fingers: I couldn't close them at
all. Frozen meat.

frozen

I just woke up with the worst dream. It is
worse than nightmares with monsters. Worse
than nightmares in which I am the monster.
Monsters are easy. You don't need to know all

about it. Or I won't explain it at all. It is just all that *Hell* you are already intimate with, and for no reason it is visiting our sacred sleep.

What about Donald? The fear that kept me when I thought to go like him to a cave. I couldn't be with the dark so dark I would surely lose. I can hardly know my own arm in this dark, where is my spine(!)?

Hot.

It is worse when dragon hasn't the slightest form.

When he resembles nothing.

Just suffocating!

It is nothing like the coming and going of Fear – Fear is nothing but muscular weakness of the will. Nothing scary-pushups can't fix: scary-pushups like: falling, or dying a couple times. This is not for Fear, this is not for Pain, this is a (*beast*) that would obliterate. I am not afraid, only tortured as I wake. I am not in pain, just sick to my stomach. The visitor unlocks things that are not buried. What a cruel joke to let these things out like wild and starving dogs needing to feast on anyone (you/me) whether the animals would lick your fingers lovingly: *normally*.

While you crawl trying to collect your reality from the soil – it's frozen stiff! Has the absence of feelings triggered an imaginary thingy? No no no no no no. No, no, no sir. No. I

have not been a shell or empty. Not at all! I have been so full! So very very very full of pain, jealousy, hurt, loss, bitter, love, ache. I am full, as if to burst: always – not happy or very amused. Ok sometimes. Ok always. The magick doesn't stop because it sucks. It was a choice to take the *full* instead of the *empty*: uninspired. I have done all these "*amazing*" things.

I am on the farm, with the storm that turns colors,
the drab grey days even with their yellows
and reds amongst the remaining green
and always brown.
I am with her and have been named:
the Magick Man
a name before,
but it is different somehow. Naïve
before, those strong, deliberate gestures named
again and again: *right, best, or true*.

What is this business of carrying rocks many times my weight? Or dragging whole pianos up hills by myself? Because there is no road, and the music is a part of the magick brought. Pianos, stones, boulders, branches, whole trees, mountains to be drug along and died upon.

Think upon yourself and not my rocks!
What are partial pianos?

But this:

this is not the exhausting and debilitating depression, not the sadness of loss, the guilt when hurting, the shame, the poisoning; certainly not the joy of a frivolous labor. Allow me a story or two of thingys I've carried. I'll tell them again in a town or at a bar loud enough to be heard by the ones one or two conversations over. Striped shirt, stockings and boots giving eyes for your tall tales: they are absolutely true! Not even a place for the man with the terrible smile in all the flames. He couldn't be bothered to suffer this "pain", he has the pain that he enjoys indulging in, this suffering is the wrong flavor.

"Don't tell him that you stayed home all day and wrote these stories and plays and played with the dogs. He expects that everyday should be like that."

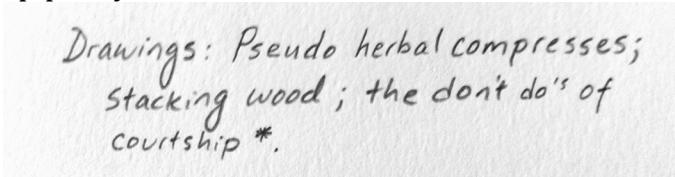
Should I tell the history of the mansion and of the madman and of the safe room, the fire and the spaces behind the walls, the lily pads and marshes leading to, the wolves that chase me round the camp, the road with the tall hill and then the turn, the farm house with the fields and the storm – the storm that turns colors round and can burst, the mansion was also kept with ghosts and was sometimes a smaller house, and sometimes housed giant monsters or monsters in water that children were fed to? There were maps of the place that I drew. And everything

came true in a way. And the madman raped and killed but didn't lie, but he was me too. Oh and the girl with the peach baskets that spilled from between her legs during that storm in the fields! Ho! Ho! Those colors always turning round, was that clockwise? It would make sense. Would it go the other way South?

Why was that important? Because it is the place I was supposed to take you, because I have been here the whole while? At least half the time, one foot in both, or both in both. But I am not entirely convinced that this blessing that has appeared suddenly in my life is not an illusion created by my finally failing touch with a physical reality or that thin veil that we name sanity. Whether *she* is imaginary or another *real* human being, now asleep by my side, I will treat *her* with the utmost respect and kindness, truthfulness and love. Why not be devoted to goodness whether it is fact or fiction?

Such and such a juncture

Types of transition: Ceremonial, unacknowledged, spontaneous, circumstantial, epiphany.



Drawings: Pseudo herbal compresses;
stacking wood; the don't do's of
courtship *.

I was delicately balanced in a tree branch
that I thought might easily break, which would
surely result in my death or discomfort, some
pain if I were unable to float down; perfectly fine
to be perched up here, though we all agreed it
was messed up and sometimes miserable, with
my best friend in the branch next to me, his
mouth always foaming and too often him biting
and kicking as hard as he could into my ribs as I
lay down on my side playing dead;
this never stops him: the playing dead,
he would kick as hard as he can if I were only a
corpse, *(will/could)*
hoping to crush my ribs, and he wouldn't be
sorry even,
but he doesn't hate me at all,
and I know he loves me.

You are presumptuous and wrong comparing this. The
reality you assume is already –

how can I even write to people who will
not listen or care to understand? Imagine and
believe it, if only a fantasy to you. Then as you
come to understand you can value the thing
again – but I promise that valuing is only your
boring distraction; misplaced excitement given
misplaced importance. You'll do this a hundred
more times before I finish telling you about my
life and the someone who came.

- The 1st problem is that you think there is a
way that things are,

- and the 2nd is that you believe I cannot be trusted to make decisions myself,
- the 3rd is that the reasons for my decisions do not bend to greet your own.

So let's begin with the reasons for my decisions; maybe from this place you might care? It doesn't matter if you care, but sometimes to the human in me it does, and I hurt because I won't be known at all. So here it is:

- I was cut from the womb but it did not phase me.
- I can step that easily from one reality to the next.
 - My human caveat: the free spirit I engage is not privileged.
 - My human feels 'better-than',
 - he is not.

Actions do not make me, nor my thoughts,
I have a human that wants,
but I am here to serve,

What does serve mean? It is sometimes only standing in the right place, upon the ships deck, in this delicate branch, or strolling endlessly through the city. Other times it is the **big wind**. For now I have no idea, I will know before and after, I am often blind during, or I close my eyes the whole time.

I might serve and this is when you call it a hardship and think I am getting my martyr thrills. If my human thinks that, forgive him for being such an idiot. It is only the thing I should do, and I rarely mind, I have been focusing on the thing that turns in my chest or stomach.

and the means are sometimes driven by the me that wants, and steered again by the one who would do again and again that which is *harder*, though it is so easy for me to do what is called hard; not that it does not always hurt so badly. I've just become very good at being in pain. Just as I am very good at being in love, and having some happy too.

The living with has come easier now that I do to do, and receive in a manner of doing.

(voice)

Here I am living with this woman and her child.
Through the day he strikes my face again and again, hoping to draw blood,
but when I go to leave, or through the nights of howling wind or wolves,
he wraps his arms around me with such love,
and in the morning too, we say hello and I'll cook something
for he and his mother who I look on with such adoration –
that is what I feel: love and adoration.

I know also that I am doing the worst thing in the world – and somehow also the thing that has to be done – and I expect no one to understand that lot of *nonsense*. I won't justify my actions by calling them *necessary*. I won't say that I have not caused horrors unimaginable.

I am a terrible man – shrouded here in magick, and pathetic too. So I am in the yard. And the swinging ax is the same as my breath. And the piles of wood are the size of my frustrations. And the working through knots is the labor I have chosen: with the ax bouncing off wood rubbered by lakes in each grain. *Splash, bounce, splash.* The labor of the convicted. Conviction.

An injury is the breaking point... if I were to stop.

(voice)

While I have been delicately balanced, living with my feral beast, and with the other loved ones who do damage to my heart (the ones that seem to appear only to try and make my mind a mess, or saw away at the branch I stand on so that I have to wrap the poor limb with tape and tree-wound-glue everyday), it was then that someone came to love me.

Someone is worse than me! I am not so bad at all, in fact my life is just as it should be, but so is someone coming to my life now too.

Someone is no savior to take me from this world. Here I remain! But can't the human have love? The human reminds the *other* to continue churning and spinning the stomach, never silencing, don't become such a shell. Someone

knows someone will be gone almost right away. And the human that is in someone's body worries, but the other spins fast and so someone will visit on this delicate branch, often floating just above and sometimes braving to stand with me. Someone spins a wheel and writes everything down, just as I recount now, but someone's obsession with this act is maybe *unhealthy* – ha ha, no! It is a lot of writing. Then just as frequently someone remains there floating above staring off into space absently entirely.

There is almost no point in someone being here. But my human loves it and hates it everyday. For the rest of us, the *turning* that is, the company is relief. And I ask you, you judging shit of person, should I have to always be unloved delicately balanced on a branch? Would someone being here with me be terrible for the beast who keeps kicking me? Just because the beast likes kicking someone as well, and then curls up at someone's feet or just up against someone's throat.

and because we will both be terrifically sad when someone is gone? Why bother loving or smiling if it will hurt? Can we only embrace when we can manage a lie to ourselves wrapped up in enough of an illusion that we can believe it?

"It won't work!"

"It won't work!"

“It won’t work!”

This is to assume that I have goals in mind, or have convinced myself that anything can “work”. (Does “work” imply forever?) The swampy water will fill the lungs whether my heart is empty or filled up. The drowning may even be romantic with the turning and full; the terror isn’t in dying or all being alone; it’d be worse to have nothing fill me up at all.

And I won’t plant the seed for the sprouts will die once they become plants, and a year passes,

and I won’t pet the dog because he will be angry later when someone else kicks him.

When I am up here in these delicate branches?

Don’t do, it will have lasting impressions.

But it won’t last.

So only if we are convincing enough to

say: "*true, forever, easy*"
are we laughing yet at what we've tried to do?
Are we going to throw the others away
because they prove to be so thin?
Call them names: *illusions, imposters,*
empty promises, eaten words

(voice)
Within this dream I am a monster.
I am certain of this because there is a sweet old
man who is my enemy.
He hates me for certain.
I'll let him walk out back where I am cutting a
hundred cords
and hit me for things
I've done and said or thought or that he
has imagined I have done said or thought,
though I've considered them *right* and *true*
again and again, even after his hitting is done.

**Of Courtship: Rule #1 never attempt arguing to obtain or maintain a love. It is cooler to lose with grace, though honesty of course should likely also accompany the other. Don't let a person know you "figured them out" and then spit a curse that they'll be alone forever and will never find someone who will love them as well as you have. Anyway do you want to be with someone who is with you because you have successfully crushed their heart with fear? Rule #2 never use a line. Rule #3 the objective is not to "get" the other. There is no objective. Rule #4 you deserve nothing and are entitled to less. Rule #5 don't try to kiss someone who tells you repeatedly that you should not. I think it was hard for them to say that to you the first time. If they begin crying or vomiting because you persist, this was probably really hard for them too. They probably have some shit going on, or its just not vibing.
Human Caveat: the above rules are made up. But they function within a specific cultural context of the early 21st century in the United States. Enjoy them with mindfulness and good humor.

You are right, I am entitled to nothing.
But it is my good fortune that someone does not
care at all.

Then I'll name someone MagickMan,
maybe stolen from another-else who stole
another-thing from me: which in no way makes
the stealing right!

Then Love showed himself to me today.
And I think perhaps it was the loveliest form I've
ever seen. Though I know I've said that before as
that is his way, you can't help but melt a bit when
someone makes sweet, curious, or even knowing,
flirtatious eyes with you – even the savage that
you have become in the forest. What could
possess such a delicate thing to trust such
expressions and suggestions, these invitations
and encouragements to a violent beast as me?
Oh, delicate he seemed, but love has shown
himself to me time and time again on this path; it
is something else to see in a pretty young thing
than in the blood of a deer or the light of the
dawn upon the first sprouted snow drops. The
blood gives way to a meal, and the latter the
promise of warmer days, the young troubled and
beautifully tormented romances and passions,
and if all goes well and you are not killed by his
ex-girlfriend, wife, mother or sister, there is the
promise of a warm house and ready-made meals
and clean clothes, a domestic life, maybe a TV too

for the child when he becomes a pain to always
distract or teach things. And a warm bed, and of
course all the bills, and jobs, and things you need.
But this is not to go on about the horrors of
domesticity. We are over that already, it is to
address the transient nature of love. He is
something wonderful, and though he invites with
many smiles and battings of the eyes. I only give
him the same in return, then I am on my way
again – into the sudden woods and all his other
beasts.

Then of the tidal road, because this might
help you remember that I am not mad at you,
only hoping that you'd care enough to
understand:

When the sand should rise and let soggy footsteps.
Sometimes it is only for me to be there as it rises.
Playing witness to the fog that parts or envelopes.
To the foam cresting, even as small as unseen.

If I leave footsteps at all
it was to be seen and remembered
or for others to know there was someone there,
or for them to be washed away before ever
noticed,
or to feed that very human want
inexorably tied to the *purpose* I pretend to host

either way it is not for me,
or is completely but does not matter one bit.

I am for the dying man upon the street, for the
woman who's heart I may have broken, for the
man who's heart she has broke, for the tree we
cut and split and dry and burn.

Living without the defined awakens –
well it does not relieve or permit –
checklists will never be crossed...
maybe those Imaginary.

~

Then of course I awaken. I only get to
visit (float above) when Jimmy is very quiet or
has let the fire go down some. And as I regain
my health, the water stays down and the soup in,
I am reminded of my friends, even Brandon as
the bear.

I have written little of Tom. He has been
sitting here; how long? He is watching or writing
in his journal too. I wonder how different his
words are than mine? I have been so wrapped
up in my own words. I should let him write in
here as well, sometimes.

9

Tom

I am home. It is not for the unknown, exposed, exotic and novel; not these alone. Or I would be misleading you to describe the fog-drenched shoreline, the nylon plucked guitars and breathy flutes; you might think that I am calling those places my “home”. That is where I am now, and where I have been, but it was also my home when I woke in the middle of the night by the half-dream of a gnome. He was in the corner of my eye, but my eyes were closed, and I was awake; but then I woke up and there was the roaring wind above me; I had been sheltered by the soft leaves and grasses and thick rhododendrons and drifts of snow. I woke in the middle of the night to the tree and wind twinkling stars, and to the moon – bright as fire – winking by leafy eyelids. It is not for the foreign, nor the wandering; not for one place in particular that I am calling *home*.

I remember when I clutched with the mind to tell the difference between *real life* and a dream; almost holding my breath, looking for clues that might not match the *laws* of nature.

The dreams were terrifically hard to stay in,

it was also by choice that I'd remain

I could leave also in life like a dream

If my dream –

if in it a *solid* thing is *released*,
should other forms (the whole universe) take note?
and like a flower: begin to unfold?

Farewells

*It is not a matter of escaping;
it is the following of the heart;
do not use one to excuse the other.*

Farewells: this is something I neglected to mention earlier. (What a year now?) I had none to give; save the inanimate objects that made up my home. That was difficult enough. There is a life that is born into things when they are with you for that long.

I admit that they started to become distant the moment they were packed up in boxes. Moved from their fixed places, small rings of dust where model horses and stones had laid. Or before then even, the day things became lonesome – the spaces between, where her things had been.

I thought my home was there, but it quickly became unfamiliar. I thought to blame. For a cause and answer. I thought that by wandering I could find something new. Of course I did; I think this is true for us all. But when the wandering came easy, the standing still wrought me with unknown; and when the embrace of unknown wrapped me with such comfort, even alone, or surrounded by maddening crowds, terribly cold, burning and

suffocating, I stepped forth to explore the known and absolute, embracing that dream as well.

The challenge might be staying at a job. But I don't stay to be secure. I'll stay for a path to dream. Each new resolution serves as a marker to think, "I've been somewhere and can go somewhere else." It is only to make the greys more evident. The space between, the formless, the boundaries can almost be seen.

I haven't told a proper story for months because *it's* been in my head. How can I bother about the happenings of the day when there is something in my mind trying to get out? Once *it* has been said, maybe then I can tell of the fog or the tide, or the glint of sun in the dew drops in cupping leaves. *It* is simple really. And I've said the things a dozen times, but perhaps not just right, and so that's why I repeat myself. But maybe the telling is the problem to begin with?

I'll write all this again. Or throw it out. Or think I've thrown it out and find it on a shelf covered in dust years later. Someone will find it in a pile of leaves where I left it in the snow the winter before. It has taken the melting spring and growing summer and falling autumn before a wandering friend came upon it stumbling in his groping in the dark. The tattered book becomes a pillow one better than a rock and then a thing to laugh at when he discovered the ramblings

within. Maybe he'll write something better, or better still: live and needn't write a thing down at all. Then when a town is not so terrible, or not so easy, or just the appropriate place for all his wandering, I'll visit and see the molding binding from across the room – even in a room only lit by a fireplace and dinner candles.

“Why? How do you have this?”

“Oh, what is that?”

“This?” Shaking the thing in my hand almost furious.

“What is that then?”

“This! This!” I repeat as if the shouting will make it clear.

“Oh that,” (apparently it has) “my pillow.”

“Your pillow? It can't be. I buried this! I threw it away! I held it under the frozen lake until it took a breath and filled its lungs!”

“It's a book.”

“It's a mess! It's wrong.”

“Why? I thought it was comforting and amusing. Sometimes longwinded and self-important.”

I open the thing and crack apart the once water logged since crisped and rippled pages. “Yes yes, this too,” and between two more:

*From great loss: torture, slavery, death of the body and soul;
is inspired change; growth by immersion to sudden and
seemingly reckless risk; from uncertainty we face fear and
may learn by actions with strong and immediate*

consequences for our choices; we are as if children again, hoping that nature will be forgiving as a parent, though we have been told that she takes no sides; we are permitted change, freedom from limits, the abusive help; but mostly that we would allow that trespassing within; fearlessness: not in the sense that we do not use caution, but in that we would face any fear; we can re-enter the world and perhaps then there is meaning.

Day-Dreaming boy, uncle, brother, and guide

I am imagining a play performed with a little boy who is wild (as a child raised in the woods), and his brother who is the bear (like Brandon has been), and their *uncle* who is just old, sometimes fun, and sometimes scary (like an uncle might be). He is not a father's or mother's brother – they had none, so not an uncle by blood – or only by blood and hardship and by the love he gives when he feels he can, according to what he calls “right”.

Wandering about the forest for seemingly no reason. Describe a progression of interests that lead the three to inquiry, about the natural world, survival, and themselves. Then a woman who guides them, admitting them in confidence to a greater power that they have interest in but know next to nothing about. And these three, and the fourth who would watch them keeping an elusive boundary, that is still welcoming, but elsewhere. She is good company, though always in the shadows, not creepy or menacing-like, rather unintrusive, and for this the three feel

they have done something themselves, because they have.

She is invested in the wilderness and the wandering, *she's* been tortured and ecstatic, and continues to walk thin edges and fall from tall trees to be eaten by the animals and bugs and plants and sun. *She* is also invested in these three. When at her best "she is engaged on their behalf, able to stand with them in the madness and storm without getting in their way, and at the same time keeping them from falling into the abyss".

Rarely the arms the little boy wraps himself in when afraid, joyful, or in love; *she* watches his beastly brother squeeze the child between his claws careful not to crush so hard. And *she* might have some delight in this, like a smile, but is also watching the sun red in the horizon, and the leaves turning up to show their white and silver bottoms.

He lets me sleep here on the floor

He has let me fall asleep on the blanket by the stove that I've sat upon, then laid down on, on my side as we continue to talk, on my back as I stare up and close my eyes. The fire is warm like in the forest; the ground is hard too but without roots or stones; the ceiling dances with shadows. He plays records until he is drunk and

tired, then cooks something for himself before loading and damping down the stove.

I've heard her howling from my warm and dry room, my *bed* and light. The howling and rumbling of the commuter train is wilder than me sitting in this room; or my drive here. On trail, powering through and along in the weather pretending (and therefore being) wiry beasts who's hair and skin did not get cold by the rain and wind, or wounded by rock or thorn. We were heaters. And now, only a week inside, I am softening; thick layers of hardened skin and will shedding off; fear emerges so suddenly now: just a needle at the doctor's office, or a jump over a park bench. The wildness of the train, even the machine that it is, and the comforts inside, to run along side, touching the iron rungs or hearing its wheels whine and roll. Stones, and rain and wooden ties. Running along side the unrelenting thing, then into the wilderness to the kind trees and their shelter and their empathy, where you lived and died and kept on, and even now as unrecognizable as you appear in your own reflection.

In dreams of the wild & his friends

I lay in the warmth of my own body against the dry leaves in my debris hut, gazing out from the mouth of my bed at the almost invisible indications of our camp: a patch of turned soil

where we had buried the pit fire, six small worlds (depressions in the earth) where the small plants of the undergrowth push a bit harder to raise up to greet the coming sun. It is a morning as I have known them: cold, blue, bright before the dawn, crisp, clear, inspired. Each friend sleeps soundly, even Brandon whom I've never seen sleep. They are breathing deeply amongst the shifting in the branches above.

Brandon, Nate, John, Jim.

Donald. First a speck of nothing as far into the forest as one can imagine, his shape and face emerge from budding leaves and woody flowers. Walking this slow and steady pace.

The turning in my heart is full, up through my head and I am not there! I am not here at all! I burst into tears, *and they crouch over me knowing that I had tried.* I wake crying again, the same terrific sobbing wakes me, on the floor by the fire, covered in down blankets, with a glass of water in reach if I outstretch a hand.

Before thoughts are interrupted

"The character you will learn to play is yourself. Identify her traits, trends, and drive. Do not simply characterize this person. Become the living character, let her fill you up. Now identify some oddity of this person, an absurd nose or voice, small feet, bad breath, or chronic pain in your arms. Now what is it about this

character that they want to be so good at, but they are so terrible at? This is what makes you funny if you are a clown. You are a clown.”

Something about the intentional weakening: to be *strong* despite *weakness*. An opportunity. Some other type of endurance that demands a softness, a constant beating down and patience for the growth again and again, like the delicate flowers that are crushed and come back again time and again to bloom, always persistent and still soft and delicate.

I hear him rustling now through the last of his belongings, this emptying mansion. The flap of a box and screech of tape, he won't be bringing those things. A light pack, and a thin coil of rope lean against the door, along with a pair of boots waiting for their return to the trail and untrod wilderness. Have all these days reading, and nights with the beaten thing beneath his head opened it? I'd like to see in again!

I'm afraid that this thought might be gone if I left it to waft and wander. Or that I might also disappear if left to waft and wander; and then I will be nothing. Even if it is true, shouldn't I be here after my mind has returned? Should my mind return at all?

Why not let it wander off? Let it drift! Whispers of sand to sea. Every thought and feeling until there is nothing! Neither peace, nor

pain, nor sense of self, nor transcendence. None of it.

For my own bravery, what I fear is letting go, I've kept this journal to write all my ideas