

## AKA

Everybody knew him as Golly, but his real secret given name was Goliath. He wasn't even a big man. It was years since he had his downfall, many downfalls. They merged in his mind, brought him proportion.

Golly waited at the frozen food department as Deborah shopped around. He needed nothing and his budget was nearly drained for the month so the Supermarket was not relevant to him, even though he enjoyed being there. The folks at Trader Jack's were always happy, members of the crew.

But Golly felt he was overstaying his welcome since he was just a sojourner, not a real citizen. The real shoppers were polite to him as they would be to almost every decently dressed stranger. A shopper woud say "excuse me." even "excuse me, sir" or even "excuse me, sir, I have to reach the frozen tacos."

Golly could make suggestions for Deborah which she would or would not accept. He grabbed the one pound chocolate bar, unique to this store, and Deborah watched it drop into the cart. Golly smiled. He had a free coffee, a demitasse paper cup. It was very strong. He drank it with sugar from a paper envelope.

The moments of quiet non-participation were a kind of respite for Golly. He watched and his mind occupied itself. He stood in this place where no one sat down. It was obvious that he wasn't busy. He occupied stationary space in a motion-rich crowd. This is no world for me, Golly thought. I'm not good for it. He watched all those seekers looking for things they needed, all younger and hopeful. He thought, as he stood with his back against the frozen food counter, ready to move as others asked, I won't be young again. In my time, I won't be able to wedge hope in, I won't have enough elbow room in the future. I miss the opportunity to hope. I miss hoping.

Often, Deborah liked to be private. In the habit of teasing, she sometimes told him that she wished he didn't come. But she always invited him. Golly took solace in that, accepted her invitation knowing how it was issued.

In spite of everything, in spite of the years in one place, Golly always wondered where he lived. The child of badness, the bully in his heart, the swallower of pride, he had stood in front of minions who adored him, then failed them and didn't die or vanish. He walked from the site of his misdeeds head cast down, not wanting to be seen. He couldn't hide. He just slipped away not un-noticed but turned away from.

He travelled. He walked down a new street with new people lining it. Songs of romance re-entered his mind. He even forgot his age, imagining himself much younger. With identity changed the past and the counts of years got muddled in his mind. All the things he couldn't have before now seemed within reach. He gave himself permission to reach for new joys.

When the past is lost and identity changes and life continues innocently day by day with the sun rising and setting and things are not painful, it was more than tolerable, it was fun. Never mind the occassional frights that happened just to keep interest up. The meals were wonderful and Golly looked forward to them.

## The Science of Mind

Sometimes the bottom falls out because he comes to believe something about himself, something good, superior even and it turns out not to be true. Sometimes when he got bad he would just say, "I'm not in the mood to give any praise right now. I need it all for myself." He would close his eyes and hoard all the praise he had ever heard.

It's surprising how the feelings last. The creature hides in its brain-nest nursing its wounds. It breathes fast through its mouth quivering a little, hiding its face. The poor wounded infant. The sun doesn't stop shining and the breeze plays in the trees, but it stays hidden in the dark as the smell of its body accumulates in the grass nest around it. Death may or may not come. But the time for salvation slowly dribbles away. It must rise. It must.

They showed nature films today at the library in Oyster Bay. Samuel went by himself because his friend was busy with a hair appointment. It was, as always, about animal sports. The people on the North Coast, living on the edge of New York City suburbs, toughened by their proximity to the unsleeping city yet hearing the growls of night creatures, have always loved rougher competition. Victory was never a passing state and defeat was a permanent stain.

In watching, Samuel could forgive the predator for vanquishing the prey. He shared the lip licking and understood the hunger. But sex was different. The female witnessed the urge driven contest with not only procreation but the sweat of defeat, the curling liquid over the thighs, at stake. He watched the dominance battles, the tooth and claw, the poignant defeat of the father by the son, the groundwork of Oedipus, the marginal male slinking around the edges of the herd, stealing glances and chased away.

Wendy didn't come inside to meet him. They scheduled a meeting outside the library at 4:35. Samuel left the small auditorium without a word. He was afraid of all the accomplished people around him. His own accomplishments being long buried in the past and beyond bravado. There was nothing to be said. And Samuel was unable to provide his own transportation home.

"My sight has always been tall," Samuel once lectured to his class when he was a student. "It was pulled wide to make space. My vision was opened like creation, first stretched with light then colored and formed." He had looked up from jittering paper as he spoke. "My sight was raised from the un-stretched, unlighted void, made out of the space of the dead."

The lone gestaltist phenomenologist, he didn't care if he invited scorn. He felt part of a movement. "Time is a rack that holds my life. The flavors and sounds of my life are stretched on pegs of time. My life was resurrected from the timeless void: from never, from silence."

Pure rebellion but not in a dangerous place. He was practicing his rebellion in the relative safety of class where he was supposed to be learning.

Along with his professor, Dr. Klein, Samuel preached the themes of the German jewish psychologists who formed a tiny cell in American universities after escaping from the onrushing menace of the Nazis. This message rankled the practical Americans who didn't like minds and perceptions, preferred actions, didn't like observation and meditation, preferred narrowed observation and experiment.

American and English mind science was a direct decendant of Darwin's pragmattic, digital, un-mysterious, bare-bones biology. The greatest achievements of this practical mind science was testing—the quest for rank, better over worse.

Years after, when Samuel had long graduated into the practical world of making a living and none of this mattered, he found out that the lengthy academic battle had ended in a strange compromise. Psychologists were calling themselves "cognitive-behaviorists," which Samuel always thought was an internal contradiction-in-terms. It pointed to the lack of any kind of real theory in psychology.

The science of the mind should be the queen of sciences. Samuel could argue that point forever. The mind invents sciences. The world resides in mind pockets—maps, models, alone in the each individual. That's where each of us lives. Our private theory world becomes public only when we educate, pass virulent thought from mind to mind. When my model is adopted by you it becomes fact for both of us. Education is the manufacture of the world.

Ants and bees pass knowledge of their surroundings through chemical models manufactured in their bodies, pass what they know through deep kisses. This is what constitutes our world, the insects say in their quiet gurglings.

Samuel was a fireworks rocket, a man of unformed brilliance. In his memory, those around him stood respectfully as he burst into color and rose, alone, high up, until he cooled and fell as ashes. It wasn't his lack of talent that cooled him. He knew how his flame died even as he left the library. It was his oedipal idealism, his grandiosity, his insularity.

For a brief few years, Samuel stood in front of college classrooms and taught what was not in the curriculum. Being small is what stopped him.

Wendy was in her car in front of the building to meet him. He waved and walked across the driveway to the car. They had done something today. That was pretty admirable for Winter. On the way, they followed the road past the inlet at low tide. The sun was low in the sky and there was a mist that made the scene of the sea hunt peaceful. Gulls and Herons lifted their bodies from the water and dove into their soup like those messy Europeans at the diner. Swans floated. Several dozen boats, idolled by the season sat at anchor. The water was framed by the bare trees.

The car skimmed past the waterfront and onto the wooded residential road.

## **Between**

Those long bus rides between Urbana, Illinois and Wheaton, Maryland were all in the interspace. There were hours of smooth nothingness punctuated by jangly nothingness at change points like Cincinnati and Pittsburg. Blurs in memory, dreamy, the taste of intensly needed sandwiches and the desperate need to be clean. Long half voyages through fantasy, through needle-sticking frustrated drives, erection, thirst, looking out of the window for relief, only to see darkness.

Samuel passed from region to region through this desert 3 times a year. He thought as he travelled over the flat land of Eastern Indiana:

In the world where people live in imagination, those who imagine themselves to be among the creative struggle against each other. They look up to heaven for special blessings, and look into the future for signs of immortality. Of course no one can see into the future, so it's in imagination, tied to self esteem. It's a dangerous way to be, hanging so much of your life on faith with so little evidence. It's like being suspended on pikes over a cliff.

The bus paused in Indiannapolis after the sun went down. Some passengers swept against him and he felt the vibration as they swung their bags one after the other, once nearly hitting his face. Then others got on. Nobody interesting. The pattern of seating changed. Samuel prayed that nobody obnoxious would chose the seat next to his. He forgot his own obnoxiousness.

There was no time to leave the bus. Samuel always felt the fear that he would leave then find himself abandoned in the inhospitable station. He sat back in his seat and waited for the interlude to pass. Overpopulation was created in a bus, perhaps worse than in an airliner, especially an airliner in 1963 when they were still polite and served food.

Thinking he was special and that he had something important to say fed his vanity and added to his pain. It was an item of faith that Samuel clung to—wouldn't let go of. It was as if feeling ordinary would take away all his hope, as if he had to practice the faith or lose it.

Years ago when a great steel gate marked the entrance to publication and the mystical editor lords sat in their office towers and pretty leafy bower cottages with their recognition stamps it was almost easier to stomach. Then dreams were easily shut down, aspiration quickly doused. Now the levers of dreams are temptingly reachable. One can hope longer, can gamble longer, can hang ones self further out over the cliff. It would be a 22 hour ride. The bus would stop a little east of the city for a rest stop and give passengers 30 minutes to grab something to eat. For a man preoccupied with competition, sibling rivalry, Samuel liked his privacy. The idea of sharing life with someone caused him to pause, loving somebody who was human and helpless made him turn away.

Samuel thought, there are only so many lines left on the honor roll of blessing. And I want a place there." He threatened all the other aspirants in his creative writing class and even wrote a rant condemning a fellow student for writing a good story. How dare he, Samuel said. He just pretends.

What Samuel meant was, can I share the eye of God with him? His words dance, sliding, take him up. His wings tilt and balance in the eye-time space, while I walk, stumble, with the rhythm of the gimp. I lead dumb words with chicken legs. They would never fly by themselves. God won't look at me at all.

Artists are made hungry. They are tempted by the breathing of their prey, like jackals, like salesmen. Hunting for the ones who live among the riches, people who know who they are, feeling immunized against doubt, feeling they have been reared to enjoy and applaud, certain of a place in the eye of God. They are the buyers.

To create an artist, Samuel would say, feed him thin so that love develops fast but imperfectly. That's what leaves a great selling. Let the artist live on group hugs and watery conversation, skinny relatives in dark places filled with folklore and fear, never quite out of myth and nowhere to hide.

"Don't invite an artist to your dinner parties, says Samuel. "Rich conversation doesn't venture where the artist goes. Thin and perverse half grown love is the burning that fuels the selling. Everything flows out, rarely in. The sale is the thing."

The bus slipped past Ohio over the line into West Virginia. There were broken and burnt hills that used to be mountains. There was no more grandeur just tricky turns and thin forests black against the snow. They made a sharp turn down a passage cut into rock. Then Wheeling came into view framed by the canyon. It was like a gentle glide into the town, down the narrow streets. In the bus, half asleep in the early morning, Samuel could sense the dark life of coal miners. He was safe from that, he thought.

Aching with fantasy, he thought, I write poetry that has an audience in my egocentric brain and I make things on paper I call art. I wait like a beggar for a passerby's disinterested eye. I wrestle with sincerity on the ancient field of paper.

It was like a game of hide and seek. He recalled just such a game. I hid behind the curtain. The others were supposed. to find me. I waited but nobody looked. I waited and listened like a deer in the forest, a little frightened, but that was the thrill of it. But nobody came. When I left my hiding place, I found the terrace door open and all had fled. The bus didn't stop in West Virginia. It is such a small state and the Maryland panhandle was only minutes away. Samuel settled in for another few hours completely saturated with resting. The slight early morning gray was like dust in the bus. Where was he going? Samuel was thinking. He was going home; but it wasn't home. It was a visit to his parents back in time. Would he ever return? Was he really welcome? They would greet him and he would be grateful.

In the ancient days, before Samuel knew, when Samuel was a troubador, the audience would come if they had nothing else to do. The singers would fill up the empty hours and sometimes a few coins would flow. We lived between the towns, in wooden carts drawn by starving horses. We had no place to go and nothing to do but watch.

Now, from the high standpoint of age, as if he looked back from a high peak with thin clouds drifting under him, Samuel realizes that now is the time for play. He pulls out his toys like he did when he sat sprawled on his parents' carpet.

## **The Mourning Words**

Four am blues, he called it. The mistakes and the unmet duties personified in his dreams made Jacob wake. Ever time he had a such a vision of a big mistake, even made years ago, he said, "Dear God" to make the vision go away. It got absorbed somehow. Jacob asked God, "Are You the great Eraser of Visions, are you the Bosom Taker, the Confirmer of good Intentions?"

Jacob mourned, not for dead because his life had not yet brought him close to that. He knew the dead would be impatient, waiting in his brain for mourning, but there were specters already there tugging him about tasks he could not complete and injurious errors. Death is not really essential to mourning. Beings who passed out of his life claimed him as much, memory ghosts lost to his life who return to dance on his memory.

We laughed together every day at coffee and broke bread. When Jacob was hungry for friendship he thought he had something constructed of laughter and shared interests. They relied on each other, confidants, conspirators, until the money stopped and there was nothing left except for the mourning. Jacob knew the value of conspiracy.

They spoke together quietly, Frances Parker and he. Elaborately constructing enemies built the bond. Conspirators without enemies make poor friends. Jacob knew this. But there would be no lonelier place than a world without conspiracy.

"You fell in love with her." Ginny told Jacob as they met walking along with the Peace Now crowd. He was pleased with Ginny's nearness. He felt a kinship in her, the last time they saw each other.

"No," said Jacob, "I didn't."

Frances and Ginny passed into ghostliness.

"Dear God." He now recites when he thinks of them.

A young student generated such unease in Jacob. Jacob hated it when he was frightened of people weaker than himself. He couldn't count on his strength and felt the pressure of oncoming humiliation. Jacob reacted with panic. And the girl passed into ghostliness. "Dear God."

Well into his 70s, Jacob's bygones were the loci of life. Memory was where the

ghosts resided. So Jacob was haunted and the haunting filled his hours, enriching him by augmenting things of the senses with things discarnate. He passed through this rich soup of animation every day. Voices and poetry, dredged scraps of speech, disconnected events harmonized.

Jacob's biggest haunting was from Rachel, the woman he was sworn to, slowly dying alone in the cold city fifteen hundred miles away while he was enjoying a life of light and dawn. It's not a practical guilt since betrayal was the only way he could have lived. The nurses and the social worker urged him to chose life. But the deep promise lingered, amplified when he received pictures with cheery captions from his children. Fading, thin, bandaged, tubed in another world or no world. Oh God. He tossed in bed and let the quilt slide off his legs.

How many years ago was it, Jacob thought, when we believed we could conquer anything. Rachel took a confident look at her problem of salvaging her life. Then it was just a feeling of dizziness when she crossed the street, she said.

Rachel consulted books, reading about a theory that such dizziness was caused by inner ear problems and could be treated with antihistamines. They bought antihistamine tablets and to tried to test it and the medication brought new and illusory hope. Rachel went to the doctors. A neurologist gave her an EEG series and declared that she was having continuous seizures. Rachel started to have bouts of pain then, finally diagnosed as severe arthritis.

Rachel was drinking lots of wine. She would hide her kegs down in the laundry and on top of the washing machine, pour the wine into paper cups. Jacob couldn't understand where the stains were coming from. He was spending his hours on the computer hiding away in the basement office. The years of joy were behind, encoded in memory and hope. But life, life always felt renewable, always heal able. Rachel and Jacob tried to stem the changes.

When they went to the mall, Rachel started needing a shopping cart to walk. Then they purchased a rolling walker. Rachel started wanting to ride on the walker because her walking slowed so much. Then they bought a wheelchair.

Pain intensified. There were medications. Doctors all hoped they could use new treatments to control the pain. Physiotherapists tried electrical stimulation, message, acupuncture. There were waves of hope.

The bed became the refuge Rachel sought more and more often. Nurses started coming to the house. When one of them suggested getting a hospital bed, Jacob said he didn't want his life to change.She told him, it already has.

It's rare, Jacob mused, for people with soft cheeks and full flesh to go someplace and never return. It's hard and sharp, their eyes squint and mouths tighten. Even the the ticket agent is surprised when he sells them a one-way ticket. "Are you sure?" the agent would say.

Repeated changes of seasons, heading once again to summer, the cycles of the day always renew. That gives hope to those in the throes of their lives. But when Jacob pleaded to the nurse how he didn't want his life to change, and she said it already had, Jacob heard her words like the words of a myth. He heard them as they faded.

"Dear God."

Jacob got out of bed and walked out of the room to check on the welfare of the cats. One was outside climbing on the backdoor trying to get in. It was cold tonight. Jacob let him in. Then he paddled back to bed, trying not to wake Roxy. Life here still felt new, even after 4 years. He remained in an old world, old habits embedded in his muscles. In reality, Jacob was protected from the past, insulated in a box made of star-dust, closed where it points to the earth but with a big opening toward the vacuum of the sky. It was unrealistic, delusional that he brought the old world back when he created dreams.