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JOSEPH'S CALM ADVENTURE



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Everything is Fine

The summer was a delight in Bucks County, Pa. When Joseph was a child. As he edged into puberty the mystery of daily life enriched in the golden sunshine. When a child grows slowly into friendship, there is no getting to know. He starts out in intimacy. Bonds of memory, territory, maps, pieces of the world are automatic. All of the members of the intimate union are living on the same planet.

Jim and Joseph lived on the same planet. Each had deposited his paths and walls into the consciousness of the other. They had a chemical handshake in their heads like cooperative machines. It's not that they were one, but they knew, each, where the other was. They drifted into familiarity.

Joseph lived next door to Brenda. He and Brenda began exploring ritual and began decoding mystery from the time their memories began. It was not just familiarity, it was joining in the development of appetities.

Remembering made Joseph gloomy, trapped in time. He felt like kicking and screaming his way out of this future which was his present and which he couldn't escape.

Generally nice, feeling he was, thinking he was a negotiator who could obtain any reasonable agreement and could find any likeable

compromise, Joseph really didn't know who he was. His true identity, how he was actually seen in the world, was kept a secret from him.

Joseph lived a very quiet life. He slept alone, awoke in fuzzy fantasies which stretched out from his dreams. The day was loaded with rituals and appetites. The knife edges of give and take rarely penetrated even the outside of the outer armor boundary layers.

Joseph thought about how he cleans everything up, as if he were not there. Everything spent on Joseph, he would pay back,. He would drink little and take only one plate, cleaned after each meal with water that would have flowed anyway. He was a healthy being, demanding nothing of the future. When I say goodbye, Joseph thought. I will not leave a residue, nothing added or taken. All my body products will be returned to the earth. The products of my brain are stored in atoms easily reprogrammed or written on paper which melts in the rain.

Joseph couldn't speak in the fog. It lubricated space, stuffing space. Voices couldn't vibrate this air. Doorbells couldn't ring. The telephone sat uselessly with all its gay little red lights un-winking. Joseph felt the containment of his space. He was free but so cold. Freedom was cold, all his pathways were trod in the snow.

Joseph dared to wish for winter to be over. Even though he didn't want to wish away any precious hours. It's just that in the spring he could walk. His vision could stretch itself over human-populated streets and he could hope for sound.

Far away were the warm warrens where voices were breathed, breath intermingled with breath, friendliness continuously tested, results instantaneously fed back, voices made sense or no sense, but the real acts of living and dying took place. Joseph knew the people there. He had been there to see them although he was not one of them for many years. He couldn't remember when.

They have big cheeks. They want to stuff as many pleasures into the years as their cheeks can hold. They spend hours in the malls and streets laughing, their eyes sitting in that strange dark background that comes from paint and their hair delicate and clean, caught and moved by every breeze. They often keep their mouths open letting everybody see their pure pink tongues. So much fun, they are immersed in funny things and baubles. The groups of friends who know everybody, assume success and never get turned away. Forever, they will buy things that make no sense and sip the manufactured pleasure of seeing everyone notice. They will live forever. They will pack to the brightest avenues forever.

But Joseph knew how he was forever making nightmares out of the grit in the deepest basement bedroom of his heart. Even when he wanted to make fun, the fun he created made nightmares.

Joseph rolled out of bed. His room crowded with books but not books worthy of respect, junk books picked up at crumbled used book stores and thrift bargains from church basements. He rarely read books.

He made his way through corridors of piles organized around his stuffed chairs. Piles became shrines in powder and cobweb. Joseph remembered the symbolism and made subtle but appropriate genuflections as he passed them.

Then he reached the exit. Joseph wore worn khaki pants and a thin jacket over a dark brown t-shirt. He reached over to a hook on the wall and pulled off a gray padded winter coat, slipped it on, opened the heavy door and went outside. The ground was speckled with dry snow. The wind came in blasts which threw the snow up over his face in waves.

Joseph was a gray man with an unkempt look. No one ever sampled his breath but nobody trusted it. Everyone wondered about his nights. Everyone imagined his bed was tossed and marked with

dark bands. But even Joseph, who sleeps alone and eats alone and whose speech is unpracticed, even Joseph, in private, constructed wistful images of love.

Joseph made his way to the nearby Zellers Cafe. He had no friends there but the waitresses were sympathetic. This was about the only social life he needed. A word of recognition coupled with comfort food for an hour satisfied something very basic.

Joseph was a regular at houses of social prostitution. He found them in many nearby businesses. He could enjoy them not tainted with the nuisance of immorality. Many people made their living that way. In fact, there was a time, Joseph would admit that he would look for things to photocopy just so he could spend time with the engaging staff at the nearby stationary store.

Joseph was relieved when he left home. He needed to get away from the house where he spent so much of his life. The house was haunted by persons who were still living. *Alone* crouched under the couch, bounced against the damaged doors. Joseph kept hearing the voices of accidents.

He returned to the house just before noon, sat on the chair up against the kitchen table. He cried.

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 intensely 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.

Joseph 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. Joseph prayed that nobody obnoxious would chose the seat next to his. He forgot his own obnoxiousness.

There was no time to leave the bus. Joseph 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 Joseph 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, Joseph 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.

Joseph 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, Joseph said. He just pretends.

What Joseph 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, Joseph 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 Joseph. “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, Joseph 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. Joseph 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? Joseph 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 Joseph knew, when Joseph 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, Joseph realizes that now is the time for play. He pulls out his toys like he did when he sat sprawled on his parents' carpet.

Two Dreams

The kids gathered in Caroline's family living room for snacks. They lolled around on the rug and chairs. The girls challenged the boys to leg wrestling contests. It was chilly out in the late autumn. There were no leaves on the trees. But the room was warm. It was soaked in joy. It was taken for granted. All who were there, Kathy and Neil, Caroline and Nolan and Pete and unrecognized others invited didn't care about the climate.

When David arrived it was an accident. He rang the bell in ignorance. Caroline answered politely, greeting him. She didn't ask for his invitation.

Neil saw David enter and everyone heard him say, "Oh no." This was the end of their joy. They all felt the cold from the inside of David's half visible body.

David never took it for granted. It was not granted. Not taking it for granted was David's transgression.

When Joseph awoke from this dream the world around his bed shimmered in late summer moonlight. Marian was not in his bed. He was in the guest room bed. He came to that awareness. Joseph had mixed feelings about sleeping alone. Maybe those feelings triggered the dream, maybe recollection.

He couldn't remember how he ended up where he was, tabulated into a household unit, counted along with the true residents of New York. He lived then among the creatures with raised eyes and straight determined walks. Then he met Marian, a

woman not a fantasy and lived as the estranged visions washed away in the years. But he was still only half visible because he couldn't take it for granted. He cooperated in the reality of the town and the country and the world but with obvious reluctance. Since he didn't do so with a whole heart, the world never fully paid him.

Not speaking up, not saying hello, slipping half-seen in and out of shops and down streets, not knowing how to make his voice call up his visibility. He walked among those who chatter, those in fashion, those with noses pointed straight ahead, with human faces so completely recognizable as to declare themselves universal, flesh solid, uniquely real. They all took this for granted. Joseph did so with reservations. The slight hesitation in his mind, in his fingers, although not really articulate-able, was noticed. Joseph was the ghost of the town. Its walls were hollow, not quite owned by him.

It took Joseph ten years of graduate school to earn his Ph.D. He thought it exceptional considering his poor memory for names.

Joseph dreamed.

He was in an experimental hospital ward. He and the other patients spent the days sitting at tables and watching TV surrounded by pristine white walls and curtains and wearing hospital gowns. It was a grand social event and Joseph never had enjoyed such a sense of belonging. One of the assistants was an attractive young woman named Linda, like the kind of young woman with whom Joseph would flirt when he was a graduate student.

The ward was designed to test a novel approach to producing food using a substance never used before and subject to universal human taboo. At first he refused to accept it, telling Linda that the thought of it made him sick. Linda persisted, moving near him in his hospital gown and describing how nicely they prepared the dish. He vacillated, closing and opening his fleshy mouth until finally he

yielded to Linda's persuasion. She was jubilant and rose to arrange his meal.

Joseph awoke suddenly before the sandwich was delivered.

Marian pointed out that Joseph's career was marred by personality flaws that opened him to fraud. Some of the mistakes of the past never got erased. The disappointment generated by them weakened the private social fabric of Joseph's quiet, withdrawn life. He never felt like a hero in his own house.

The job of Joseph's wife was to prevent undue self-esteem. Joseph had thought that ending his isolation in the permanent company of a woman would flatter him. It turned out not to be true. It was the same as his belief that he would be the master of his house. Marian couldn't help it. It was an evolutionary reaction against moral weakness, to build shame.

Joseph worked as a TSR. Telephone sales representative was his profession. Not what he planned and worked for. Failure was frightening and refreshing as he came down.

At Re-Tel Corporation International selling telephone donations for minor charities that needed that kind of help he was part of a troop of telephone headset wearers, long evening hours bent over a monitor that spit his script out at him as well as bits of history. Selling was frightening, a flow of human voices giving and not giving, under the hot light of chance. Joseph always thought that chance was the language of God. He tried to measure his regeneracy by his sales, a gambler's preoccupation, watching waves of numbers on display, flowing through the hours and minutes, envy and embarrassment.

Joseph sold for half-legitimate mortgage banks, credit card companies, low legitimacy financial schemes, absurd mail order offers with hidden clauses that had to be read quickly. He sold

memberships and subscriptions, contract deals. Ten years of pretense fell to earth and ten years of raw labor of the heart.

Legally, the shift had to end by 9. It was completely night and the late autumn had shifted into cold as the would-be, might-have-been Joseph made his way to the glass bus shelter. He did feel like a citizen tonight, one among many. Those in the shelter, slightly hand-me-down and raw, everyday human products shared a metal bench or stood against the glass looking for buses. The wind managed to get under the plate glass and made him shiver, a mild form of fear because of the shadows around him.

Joseph always saw himself as young, the youngest and most helpless in the room, even with his bald head, his graying sideburns and his old man beard. Apparent seniority and sophistication hid him and he rode around in his face and body like rajah in a tent atop an elephant.

On Wednesday evening when Joseph had off, while he waited for the fright of his next shift, he and Marian went to the nearby casino. They had dinner in the plastic cafeteria, fitted to look like Acapulco, which he would never see in reality. They kept their expenses for gambling down to ten dollars. Each of them sat at a 25 cent slot and watched the flow of spinning fruit and diamonds. Here was Joseph's hall of prayer. The slot machine was his prayer wheel, the word of God suspended in time directly viewable in wins and losses. He saw the hills and valleys of the hidden holy world.

The Guest

Joseph surprised his hostess by announcing he was going to spend the day walking. But she did not suggest she go with him.

Along the shore, the beach provided a least a pathway. It was linear—back or forward. Joseph knew there would be landmarks along the water, places where people would gather or even places where people spent their lives. Joseph himself was only a visitor to this ribbon land by the ocean.

The ocean, empty of people, was a blankness. The true earth was crowded with the familiar facial form: cartoon, real, sketched on concrete with chalk, carefully circled in crayon by children, scrolled on birthday cakes, captured by camera with teeth all whitened, portraited, imitated, formulated. We don't wake up until we see it. We even plaster it on birds or cats or pigs and laugh and laugh. How much these creatures imitate us, want to be us, replace us, take part with us. We don't put it on fishes, except maybe the friendliest kind. We resent the arthropod, the lobster, the spider, the insect that appear to spite us.

A neighborhood like other neighborhoods it was. Many citizens spent their lives here. It was worthy of never leaving. The citizens met in public places and found each other, chatted about shared memories, old times, talked shop, shared new data about common acquaintances. Joseph would see them. He would look like a human being, appropriate, polite. His exchanges were never received with joy. His presence always required an investment beyond what citizens were willing to make.

Sometimes Joseph just needed a little gift. Life in the sea of

faces passed like a trip through mayonnaise. He got tired of it sometimes, the bits of effort, seeing the same outlines, profiles, configurations without relief. He needed something new. Joseph often found it on E-Bay. He still had remnants of hunger for particular manipulanda that he needed to toy with. He knew he could find them in the E-Bay open marketplace.

And it occurred to Joseph that he could sit by himself anywhere and let thoughts slip and slide through him. He could sit face to face anywhere with someone in silence. He could let manners and conformance decide for him what to say. He could cast casual glances across any table without piercing his silence. He could speak without breaking holes in his solitude, anywhere. He could float in the sea anywhere, watching for storms but not really caring.

He was here. It was a long day in Summer. Joseph decided to leave the beach and head out into the forest which surrounded the beach. The forest was broad and dark. But Long Island was a civilized place. And it was an Island, only so big and bound by the sea and the sound. If he walked through the woods he knew it would eventually end and he would emerge into a less camouflaged region.

Joseph was opposed to a belief in hell. He was one of those who entered the fray and drew the line there. But he was still afraid that God would hate him. It was very unpleasant to imagine this Old Man, Uncle Figure, Kindly Archetype hating you, turning His back, wanting to leave your house, sniffing at the impurities. The question is, could Joseph still avoid this. Was it too late?

He passed through the dense boundary region of the woods, pushing some vines and thorns aside. Then the trees made air space between them, columns in a medieval church. Like the sea, the forest lost its boundaries. He walked, with the sun blinking on and off over his head.

Just look how Joseph lives, the judges would say when Joseph is judged sitting in a restaurant. He never touches. Conversation is

abbreviated. One never gets into his soul although he thinks all the time about souls. No one near him feels they know him, scoffed and not admired, solitude and light praises, acts of presumption and expectations about invisible ghosts with bodies of distance and dream.

Then, suddenly, the land got complicated. A bank of rock and grass bordered a creek. The forest like a dream grew larger inside than it was outside. The land challenged and dared him.

The Microscope Man

Joseph thought the microscope is a way of stopping time. Time is irrelevant, he thought, inside that tube. It's as if time doesn't bother with things that small. When you travel through the microscope you slip away from time into silence and rest. A new inventory of mysteries situates calmly for your eyes. There is no sound, no impact, no danger, just your mind. He laughed as he thought of it. He smiled inwardly.

He saw eternity through that lens, including the buried, unhappy earth, away from the sun, separated from whatever is regenerate and warm. Unearthly markings on a moist earth toned shell are, surprisingly, also from the earth.

It could also be a return to something simple, a world of closed loops where kinks and corners weren't invented, where animals mixed and organelles slipped through each other, eating inside each other within impossible rooms of gelatine.

Out here, Joseph thought, we hold the line cold and fast. We lock and crimp sharp. The circle is only an ideal we can't match. The thought came up from the great tube of body and brain.

And Joseph wanted to make vows. Promises gave bones to his amaeboid nature, froze him into a shape. Kept time from spreading him. He could imagine leaning back into someone he could trust, someone loyal. He would vow first, pledge allegiance, then assume it would forever be the same and equal, a stasis. Days would pass and pass, morning first judgements, afternoon fulfillments, evening muddled driftings and slow, graceful nights.

Joseph took a walk. He was settled in a cul-d-sac of trees. Birds

were like small novelties, flickering in and out of his vision. But their singing was always there at least in the distance. As the sun slipped into its orange-yellow phase, colors enriched. He bathed in the place he was, in his body filling in details, drawing conclusions, projecting a meaningful image to his eyes.

How cold it would be when sunlight devolved into its true meaningless nature. The birds around saw sunlight so differently from Joseph. The insects who chomped on each other and grew babies inside each other, the parasites with their unimaginable lives, the small things who spent lives in rock cracks and on bubbling fissures under the sea, found their loves there ate their dinners not on tiny dining room tables or unimaginable restaurants in cold and heat without bathing suits or winter coats. Why did they live those lives? Why did Joseph live his?

Everything was in colonies, even the rocks. Cousins and siblings clung together in small fortresses with tiny walls around them. It wasn't for safety. It was to maintain reality which depended so much on consensus. He could almost hear the small voices calling each other, "Are you there? Am I not alone?"

Joseph trudged through the forest on the border between his and theirs.

Marian slept late today. She was dreaming about heaven situated at a beach resort where it never gets cold. She woke to an empty house.

"Are you there? Joseph, are you home?" She called.

There was no answer.

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. Joseph 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, Joseph 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.

Marian didn't come inside to meet him. They scheduled a meeting outside the library at 4:35. Joseph 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 Joseph was unable to provide his own transportation home.

“My sight has always been tall,” Joseph 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, Joseph 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 descendant of Darwin's pragmatic, 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 Joseph 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 Joseph 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. Joseph 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.

Joseph 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, Joseph stood in front of college classrooms and taught what was not in the curriculum. Being small is what stopped him.

Marian 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.

Insane Songs

Many would judge Joseph as an old man. He wasn't he accustomed to the idea of course. When he walked through his life he kept old songs in his head, old songs about new streets, meeting strangers, the opportunities for romantic discovery. The magic of romantic discovery never quite wore away from his hopes. He still believe-hoped in some magic love that would bring him to new warm shores and thrill him with pretty fingers.

Joseph actually had the same hopes now that had when he was twenty and longing. All of the things he had longed for when he was 20 have really come to pass. But the flavor of reality is not the same as the flavor of dreams. As Joseph took walks in the city, the flavor of dreams drove his fantasies. New people, new places saturated in the honey of dreams.

As he walked the old songs played themselves through his mind. Some of the songs were heard when Joseph was a small child, as his mother stood over the ironing in 1947. It was Summer in Hatboro, Pa. Some of the songs were heard on the black and white TV in the midst of Saturday evening family circles. Some of the songs were later, songs of folksy pretension. The songs persisted, anchors of memories, like the crystalline seeds of clouds, the mother of a tribe.

'I sing all day,' chanted Joseph, "the old songs, and hope the irrational things they hope."

So his walk through the streets was a sequence of hopes arranged like songs. Of course they were lies compiled by his body. Joseph's body neglected time, a central tenant of hope. His skeletal,

ghostly hopes were wishes given added impact from songs that came from years when his stock of time was richer. Now hopes like these were looney.

I'm going to start drawing heavy lines around my portrait, thought Joseph. It's time I made a fortress to protect who I am. I can feel the borders weakening even now. I think that's how the youthful world will kill me, not from the inside, but by wearing down my outer edges, making room. They need room. They worry about room.

I will protect what is left of myself against advice, suggestions, declarations about my incorrectness, commands. Those make me turn my head this way and that, frightened like a hunted animal.

Goliath

Everybody knew him as Joseph, 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.

Joseph waited at the frozen food department as Marian 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 Joseph 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 would say "excuse me." even "excuse me, sir" or even "excuse me, sir, I have to reach the frozen tacos."

Joseph could make suggestions for Marian which she would or would not accept. He grabbed the one pound chocolate bar, unique to this store, and Marian watched it drop into the cart. Joseph 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 Joseph. 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, Joseph 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, Marian 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. Joseph took solace in that, accepted her invitation knowing how it was issued.

In spite of everything, in spite of the years in one place, Joseph 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 occasional frights that happened just to keep interest up. The meals were wonderful and Joseph looked forward to them.

The Mourning Words

Four am blues, he called it. The mistakes and the unmet duties personified in his dreams made Joseph 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. Joseph asked God, "Are You the great Eraser of Visions, are you the Bosom Taker, the Confirmer of good Intentions?"

Joseph 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 Joseph 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. Joseph 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. Joseph knew this. But there would be no lonelier place than a world without conspiracy.

“You fell in love with her.” Ginny told Joseph 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 Joseph, “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 Joseph. Joseph 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. Joseph reacted with panic. And the girl passed into ghostliness. “Dear God.”

Well into his 70s, Joseph's bygones were the loci of life. Memory was where the ghosts resided. So Joseph 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.

Joseph's biggest haunting was from Marian, 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, Joseph thought, when we believed we could conquer anything. Marian 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.

Marian 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. Marian went to the doctors. A neurologist gave her an EEG series and declared that she was having continuous seizures. Marian started to have bouts of pain then,finally diagnosed as severe arthritis.

Marian 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. Joseph 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. Marian and Joseph tried to stem the changes.

When they went to the mall, Marian started needing a shopping cart to walk. Then they purchased a rolling walker. Marian 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 Marian sought more and more often. Nurses started coming to the house. When one of them suggested getting a hospital bed, Joseph said he didn't want his life to change.She told him, it already has.

It's rare, Joseph 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 Joseph pleaded to the nurse how he didn't want his life to change, and she said it already had, Joseph heard her words like the words of a myth. He heard them as they faded.

“Dear God.”

Joseph 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. Joseph let him in. Then he paddled back to bed, trying not to wake Marian. Life here still felt new, even after 4 years. He remained in an old world, old habits embedded in his muscles. In reality, Joseph 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.

