

Vanishing Spells: How to Make Things Disappear (And How to Get Them Back!)

by (someone who has vanished)¹

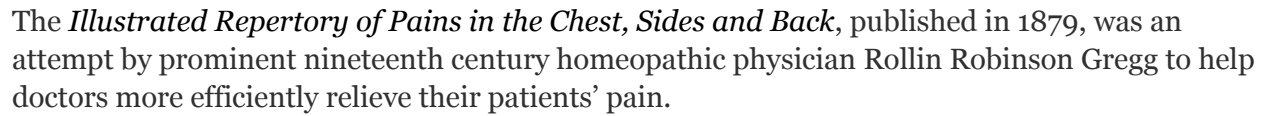
¹ but not really. people never do.

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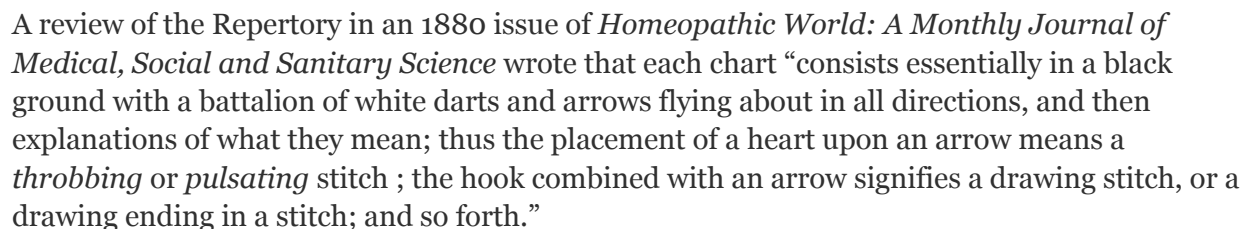
“You band of ghosts, demons and obstructing spirits here,
How sublime it is that you’ve come at this time.
...[P]lease, don’t hurry; relax and stay a while.
Let’s chat about everything under the sun.”

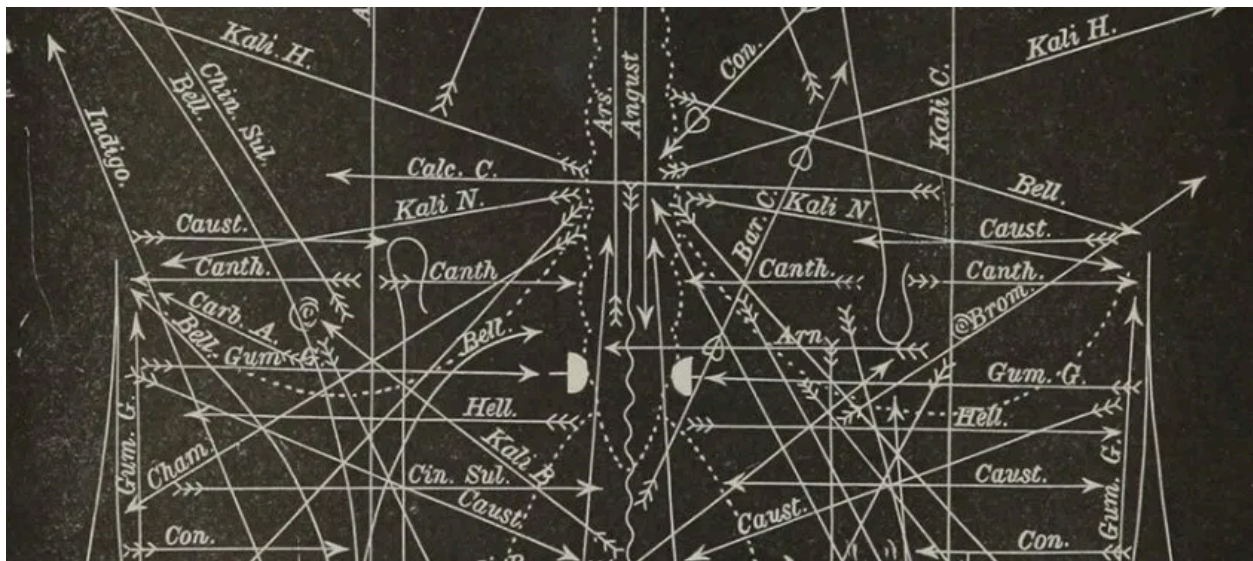
“Mila Gathers Wood”
Milarepa

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The book consisted of fewer than 80 pages and 5 charts. Each chart depicted a human torso from the front or from the side, peppered with symbols illustrating the directions in which various types of pain were known to travel.





The *Homeopathic World* reviewer was not convinced of the practical utility of Gregg's endeavor, however, opining that "[t]he *idea* of helping our sadly overladen memories with the aid of pictorial symptomatology is very laudable, but this host of arrows makes confusion worse confounded. Try another plan, dear doctor, and send us an advance sheet."

Unsurprisingly, Duncan Brothers, the book's American publisher, conveniently omitted that observation from their advertisements for the Repertory, choosing instead to include only the complimentary note on which the review ended:

"[T]his book teaches us one very useful lesson, which our careful author has evidently learnt well, viz., the very great importance of noting the *directions* of pains."

“Here’s another joke: “She calls me up and says, ‘Get over here. There’s nobody home.’ So I get over there, and guess what. There’s nobody home.”

– **Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow***

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Okay, fair warning.

If human history is any indication, what we’ve embarked upon together here won’t be everyone’s cup of tea.

Here lie books within books within books, and hints pointing to clues pointing to something elusive and seemingly always just out of reach.

And who knows how many arrows (do you?).

Someone once said that all realization of truth is the discovery of a metaphor. Which, despite not itself being a metaphor, is a true statement, thereby proving its own falseness. Ask Kurt Godel, Mister Incompleteness himself, if you don’t believe me on that one.²

The point is, sometimes it’s not that way at all. There are rare but real situations where metaphor simply does not apply, where for instance, as Pablo Neruda once wrote, the blood of children runs through the streets like children’s blood, and there’s not much else to say.

Which brings me to this.

How deeply must you pierce a boy’s heart, and with what, to abort the man growing inside of him?

What routes does his pain travel?

And who, exactly, do you think you are?

I know who I am. I’m nobody special, with nothing to offer you that you don’t already have.

Call me what you want. Ishmael, if you like. Call me Brokenness.

Think of me not as the wild woman but as her wound. Which is to say, your wound. A raw red mouth that suddenly cannot stop singing. Imagine that by turning these pages you are unknowingly slicing open something that matters, something vital, and that what you’re reading now is simply a high fidelity transcription of the sounds your life makes as it trickles away, slipping back into the absence from which it came.

Are you confused?

Is there a name you answer to but have never heard spoken?

Are you sorry for what we’ve done?

Do you know the difference, the actual technical distinction, between a mistake and a sin?

Important questions, all. Ask away. Don’t let me stop you. By all means, have at it.

But do it quietly, please, if you can.

“The end is in the beginning and yet you go on.” Right. Samuel Becket thought so. Was he right? Who knows.

But the ending seems as good a way to begin as any.

So that said, let’s get on with the catastrophe.

² Kurt, a logician and someone Einstein regarded as a peer who actually understood what he was talking about, proved via the Incompleteness Theorem that any attempt to prove every axiom in mathematics was impossible in principle

Part 1: The Aftermath

This is the book we were given.
In the penultimate chapter,

a gnarled branch of old man lies
bent and twisted
beneath a wrinkled white sheet
far to one side of a hard thin mattress
in a dimly lit room
alone.

And yet if

we watch him, he won't be

so will you? watch him with me? and you?

(turn the page if you choose to watch the man)

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Excellent. So here we are. You, me, the man, and you.

Assume for the sake of argument that we can see well enough in the sparse light to conclude with reasonable certainty that this man about whom we are now concerned is resting on his left side, and that he appears to be drawing both of his knees toward the general direction of his chest.

The man will seem to us at first glance to be asleep. But he is not.

His eyes, although rheumy and exhausted, are open.

It is difficult to say for sure, however, what if anything he sees.

The man stares barely blinking and with little apparent interest in the direction of a wall a few feet away, and occasionally, he seems to breathe.

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Which reminds me.

Try not to forget that Zen story you heard that time with the two monks and that woman down by the river. It's a keeper.

I love that one. Do you remember it?

"Brother," the older monk says. "I put that woman down miles ago."

That's from the story.

"Why are *you* still carrying her?," the older monk says.

What a punchline. Man, I wish I could meet that guy. Don't you?

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Evidence of dawn stains the wall on which our man focuses. Sunlight blooming around the edges of a pair of thick maroon curtains across the room is being broadcast onto the pale yellow paint there, forming a slowly evolving work of honey-colored abstract art. Some kind of interference pattern. There is physics involved.

Time goes by. A long series of moments, each of which passes a little differently for each of us: you, me, the man, you, depending on our relative velocities and positions. More physics, we suppose.

And still we appear to have only what we had when we started: a still-not-sleeping man; his still-vacant stare; the sun pattern shifting but still not forming anything in particular; the room's silence broken only by the barest whisper of his sporadic, raspy exhalations.

But with nothing better to do, we wait. As if we know that something important is imminent, that our patience will be rewarded.

Enough moments pass, however, that we do begin to wonder: are we in the right room, at the right time?

Is this the right man?

As it turns out, just as we pose that last question, we hear it.

What we suddenly realize we are here to witness.

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The sudden crash hits us like a well-designed jump scare in a film: even though we know it's coming, we startle.

A clanging havoc of chain reactions follows: glass shattering, silverware tinkling, ceramic plates clattering and spinning on a hard floor, a woman's voice cursing loudly in a language we do not understand.

Someone out of our range of vision has clearly had some sort of accident. Dropped some things, possibly fell. Maybe collided with something, or someone? Tough to say precisely. All we have for the moment is the audio to go by.

Whatever it is, the man's entire, bony frame violently jerks and convulses in response. His eyes widen and his neck strains and his veins bulge; his mouth twists into a grimace that is difficult to watch. He wriggles back from the mattress edge, closer to the middle of the bed.

As we begin to hear scraping and brushing, accompanied by indecipherable muttering and the sounds of things being put back in their rightful places, the man lies on his back, trying not to move. He appears to be listening. His eyes dart in haphazard directions, and he breathes rapidly, almost gasping. He clutches his bedsheet in two trembling fists and a look of utter torment pours from his sallow eyes.

After a few minutes, the noises that appear to affect him so die away, and the prior silence of the room is restored. It is some time however before the man's hands relax their grip on the linens and his respiration slows.

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Something you should noh.

Noh is a traditional Japanese dramatic form with origins in Shinto rites. Stories are related through dancing and singing by masked actors.

Many noh can be said to fall into one of two categories: *genzai* (or present time) noh, and *mugen* (or phantasmal) noh. Each of the two categories conforms to patterns that once learned can make it easier to follow along.

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At some point, the man finally sits up in bed. A clump of thin silver hair shaped vaguely like a question mark stands more or less straight up in the air atop his head as he does.

He blinks a couple of times, surveying the shadowy room around him: bureau, chair in one corner, yellow walls, small desk accompanied by another small chair.

On that desk is a cardboard box, sealed with packaging tape.

The man licks his palm and makes an effort to flatten the rogue strands of hair, then eases over to the bed's side. His skinny legs dangle while he locates a pair of slippers by groping with his bare feet, and he stands. Gingerly. He stretches out a pair of trembling arms and yawns. He takes a few shuffling and unsteady steps on a beige carpet, heading toward what passes for a hallway in this small, mostly rectangular space: a few feet of narrow room that terminates in a closed, light brown door. There is another, similar door to the left of that one on the adjacent wall.

The man opens that second door and enters a small bathroom, where he proceeds to do his business. Sighing. Grunting softly. After that, he makes his way to the sink and vigorously brushes his teeth, rinsing out his mouth with antiseptic. Although he checks himself in the mirror above the sink numerous times, the hyper-attentive viewer (is that you?) might notice that the eyes with which he looks into the glass and the eyes that stare back at him from it never quite make

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contact.

ATTENTION

noun

“the act of dealing with or taking special care
of someone or something”

Did *you* happen to notice?

How about you?

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Leaving the bathroom, the man turns, and ends up once again looking at that box. That *package*. It has a white mailing label on it, with block letters printed in black marker, and evidence of postage.

He shuffles himself over to the desk, opens a drawer, and withdraws a pair of scissors. Soon, the box is filleted like some just-caught fish, and the cardboard flaps bend off in four different directions. The man stands for a long time over the box, looking inside. Something is wrapped in tissue paper in there. A handwritten note sits on top of the tissue.

The act of retrieving a pair of eyeglasses from the nightstand next to his bed involves more shuffling of feet, more slippers dragging on the carpet, more time, back and then forth, across the room. Eventually, glasses on, pinching the note between a forefinger and thumb, the man uses his other hand to pull aside one of the curtains so that sunlight strikes the index card on which it is written.

He reads.

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Found this. Thought you should have it.
I really hope you're doing well these days.
Will call soon.

- J

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Setting down the note, the man sighs and pauses for a moment. Then he looks into the box with an inscrutable expression. Finally, tentatively, he reaches in and begins peeling back the layers of tissue paper inside.

Imagine that we now watch him from the point of view of the package's interior, and that we see a series of ripples pass over his face as the paper parts to reveal what it holds: nothing so dramatic as a furrowed brow or pursed lip or even a slightly flared nostril, but something nonetheless: a sequence of somethings, waves of some kind of subtle disturbance.

At any rate, at some point, the man carefully reaches into the box, and he extracts its payload.

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The problem is, life doesn't normally come with formatting hints, does it?

Bold red fonts and ALL-CAPS are few and far between in the real world. Sure, every once in a while a cluster of men consumed with well-cultivated, blind hatred fly a couple of planes into the two tallest buildings on earth, or an entire country abandons compassion and common sense and goes on a barbaric, murderous rampage, or the notion that certain types of people can be regarded as property comes into vogue, or a small group of broken-hearted, broken soldiers turn their weapons on the civilian populace of a small village, or a disturbed child vents his isolation on his classmates with a semi-automatic weapon, or nearly an entire species of the largest, most beautiful mammals on earth is butchered en masse for financial reasons. So, I mean, yeah, it happens.

But really, how often?³

And anyway the bald truth about all that shit is that none of it would be even conceivable without the day-to-day seepage, the steady dripping retreat, the sheer creeping terror in the face of the relentless pinball machine of experience that leads us to get it exactly backwards, to believe that we have responsibility for and control of anything but the content of our own hearts.

The **bold red crap** in CAPITAL LETTERS may be where we find the drama, but that's just branches and leaves, friend.

It's the small print you have to watch out for.

The seeds.

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³ I mean it. Really. How often?

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What the man appears to hold now in his spotted, wizened hands is a hardcover book with a white cover. There is no jacket.

This is that book

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The Palace of Now here

A People's History





The man studies the object in his hand as if it were an exotic stone. He turns it over multiple times. There is no writing or imagery on the back. The title is repeated on the binding, but that is it.

He discovers through some final rummaging that the box also contains a #2 pencil, which he sets down on the desk. It has teeth marks on it.

Eventually, he sits down in the chair. He takes one last look at the now empty box before opening the book. Then, adjusting his glasses on the bridge of his nose, he begins to read.



Therefore come with me
To the palace of Nowhere
Where all the many things are One:
There at least we might speak
Of that which has no limitation and no end.

men have become the tools of their tool

The question is not what you look at, but what you

see what I mean, Dad?"

Jason “Jay” Gaitskell -- fortysomething, bearded and brown-haired, with more girth around his abdomen and face than he would care to admit -- looks up from a magazine to focus his attention on his 16-year old daughter Sara, who sits next to him on the other side of the couch.

“Sorry, Sar. What’s that?”

“Oh god, I wish you would listen the *first* time. You’re so *distractable*.”

Sara is long and lean, with raven black hair and dark eyes. She’s wearing a brown T-shirt emblazoned with a cryptic yellow question (“Which wolf?”) and jeans with scattered holes in them. Her posture and demeanor speak to a deep, natural sense of ease with the world around her. Her legs are folded underneath her posterior, and on the side table to her left is a notebook, pen, and several strands of rope of different colors and thickness.

“I was *saying*, father of mine, that the spoon tap method actually works. I thought it was pretty stupid at first, but my results show it isn’t demonstrably less effective than the other approaches I’ve tested out. Weird, huh?”

“Spoon tap? I think I would have agreed with you there, based on the name alone.”

“Right, it’s kind of stupid.”

The room around Jay is half-library, half-living room, and distinctly upper-middle class. Very upper-middle. The floors are immaculate dark brown wood, as are the ceilings, which slant and converge from four directions to a point many feet above the floor. A massive stone fireplace takes up most of one wall. Two pairs of French doors lead out to a stone patio. Built-in bookcases with ornamental details carved into the wood line part of three walls and are filled with reading material.

Jay sets the magazine, an issue of *Psychology Now*, down beside him on the forest green fabric of the couch. On the cover is a black and white photo of a middle-aged man with horn-rimmed glasses, next to which are printed the words, “Remembering Viktor Frankl”.

“How many does that make?” he asks.

“Well, there’s spoon tap. Then there’s the thing where you twist the end, and slowly push it back through the hole where it came from. And the one where you use a corkscrew to pry it apart. And the option I’m sure you like: understand the knot, grasshopper, study it for like forever, then using all of your acquired wisdom, methodically unravel it.”

Jay smiles. “I do like the sound of that one.”

“Figures. Everything’s a puzzle, right? Knots, people, the grocery store. Like all those clues you used to sprinkle around the house at Christmas. Easter eggs at Christmas!” Sara runs a

hand through her hair and shakes her head in mock mockery. “Dad, dad, dad. ‘Understand and unravel’ is more of a strategy than a tactic, though, wouldn’t you say? The others are so much more concrete and specific. Well, except for maybe my favorite, which is more of a...principle, I guess you’d say.”

“Ah, right. I remember. The Gordian Solution.”

It’s Sara’s turn to smile. She flashes a thumb’s up.

“Damn straight, chief! Change the game. Think out of the box. Quick work with a sharp sword goes a long way.”

Sara makes a chopping motion with one hand. Jay nods in admiration.

“Gotta admit, I like it. Do you have a working title yet?”

“‘A Systematic Analysis of the Effectiveness of Various Means of Untying Knots’.”

“Sounds perfect. When is it due again?”

Sara scrunches up her face like she’s just eaten something sour. It’s an expression Jay has seen many times, and it brings out her freckles.

“Oh, don’t start with the dates, Dad. It’s not a CIA reconnaissance mission, it’s a high school science fair. I’m just making sure it’ll be ready when the time comes.”

Jason raises a hand. “Point taken.”

Sara leans back, settling a bit more into the couch. She runs a hand through her hair one more time, and bites her lip, her front teeth showing for a moment. *Thinking*. Jay sits and waits. He has seen this process before. A question is coming.

“So...I have a question,” Sara says.

“Shoot.”

Sara gives him a look.

“I’m thinking of leading my presentation with a joke. What do you think of that idea?”

“Well, it probably depends on the joke.”

"Yeah, I thought you'd say that. I found this really corny one, but it's apt." Sara pivots in her seat, turning to face Jay, raising her eyebrows and smiling. "Here it is. Two strings walk into a bar...wait, have you heard this one?"

"I don't think so, no, based on the first, like, five words."

"Okay, right, smart guy. Anyway, so two strings walk into a bar. There's a bouncer there, who stops them from getting in. The bouncer says, 'I'm sorry, but we don't serve strings here.' So the strings leave. Outside in the parking lot, they take a few parts of themselves and loop them around the other parts, each other's parts, and they frazzle each other's hair. Then they walk back inside together. The same bouncer's standing there. He stops them again and asks, 'Excuse me, sir. Aren't you a string?' One of the strings says, 'Nope. I'm a *frayed knot*.'"

Sara guffaws dramatically, grabbing her stomach as if she can't control her own laughter.. "Get it, Dad?! A *frayed knot*?!"

Jay groans.

"Oh...my...lord. You were right, kiddo. That is apt. And really, really, *really* corny." He smiles. "I like it. And I actually had heard it before."

Father and daughter sit grinning at one another then; just that, nothing else, simple smiling. In the background, in the silence between them, a clock ticks, distantly. Over Sara's left shoulder, Jay sees sunlight pouring through the glass of the French doors, highlighting what looks to be a gorgeous day outside. For Jay Gaitskell, this is a Moment: a drop of nectar to savor. Children grow up so fast, and you never know what can happen. It's so important, he thinks, to appreciate times like this. He almost wants to cry.

The Moment, however, only lasts for as long as its name would suggest. Sara's gaze soon drifts toward something behind and above Jay's head, and her smile falters a bit. Jay turns to see for himself, and finds a teenage boy in a wrinkled white short-sleeved shirt and khaki shorts, standing next to the couch. The boy holds a memo notebook in one hand and a ballpoint pen in the other. He is immediately identifiable as Sara's brother. He has Sara's complexion, her eyes, her nose, cheeks, mouth, all of it. Exactly. Never mind brother, we realize. What we have here is Sara's twin. Only the length of their hair (his hair is curly and a good bit shorter than his sister's, which is straight and long) and a certain meatiness to his jawline seem to distinguish them physically from one another.

In contrast to his sister, though, the boy looks deeply uncomfortable, anything but at ease. Something about the way he stands, the tilt of his head, the expression in his eyes. He fidgets, constantly transferring weight from one leg to the other as if never finding the right balance. An anti-Sara in that regard.

"Oh, hey, Sam. I was just talking to your sister about the science fair project. How's yours coming along?"

Sam writes a word on the notebook, then reads it aloud.

"Fine."

"What's your topic again?"

Sam sighs. Writes a few words. Reads them.

"I'm comparing ionic, covalent and metallic chemical bonds."

"Right. How could I have forgotten? The Contrarians. One of you zigs, the other zags. Vegan versus carnivore. Nature versus video games. So of course. Sara looks at how to disentangle things, you want to explore how they stay fastened together. I remember when it was just the opposite, you know. You two did *everything* the *same*. You used to even dress the same when you were really young, do you know that? And Mom and I weren't the ones pushing it, it was you guys. Whatever the heck happened?"

Jay glances toward the end of the couch for confirmation or some kind of response. He can't read Sara's face. He turns back to his son. Sam doesn't react either way, just stands there, waiting, looking at Jay. After a moment, he flips back a page in his notebook and reads from it.

"Can I have twenty-five dollars, please?"

"That depends. What for?"

Glancing down at his script, not looking up from it this time, Sam reads what's there.

"The grave needs flowers."

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Seconds later, while hurrying through a kitchen featuring black soapstone counters and doorless cabinets full of elegant dinnerware, Sam puts things away into pockets. Two twenty dollar bills get crumpled into the back of his shorts, while the memo notebook and pen are carefully slipped into the front pocket of his shirt. Entering the mudroom off the kitchen, he quickly locates a pair of sneakers on a mat. Light streams from a row of windows facing out onto a driveway and flat, lush lawn as he takes a seat on the wooden bench position by the outside door. He is just beginning to tie his right sneaker when a six-year-old girl with a pair of golden blonde ponytails sprouting from either side of her head appears in the mudroom doorway.

"Hey," the girl says.

She takes a couple of steps into the room and abruptly stops. She stands there, arms by her sides, staring at Sam. Her long-sleeved shirt is pink with thin purple stripes, and below her pale blue shorts, her pale white legs are covered in childhood war wounds: small dim bruises and scrapes all over one shin and thigh, and a vivid blotch of raspberry on the other knee that looks particularly painful.

“Do you wanna play Speedy Express?” she asks, with a slight lisp caused by a missing front tooth. Her mouth forms a broad, eager, pleading smile and she stands on tiptoes, leaning in Sam’s direction. “Pleeease?”

Sam stops tying the sneaker so that he can extract the notebook and pen. He writes a few sentences, then reads.

“Can’t now, Jena. I have stuff I need to do. I’ll play you with you later though, OK?”

Sam makes an “ok” sign with his forefinger and thumb, arches an eyebrow, and tries to return his younger sister’s smile with only mixed success. Jena’s face collapses into a semi-serious pout. She crosses her arms dramatically, stomps one foot, and vacates the room.

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Decision Time

Welcome, dear reader, to the interactive portion of our proceedings!

This is the point in the story where you get a say. You now have the opportunity, right here, to **Choose Your Own Narrative**.

Don't worry: this isn't one of those books where you need to make a choice every five paragraphs and keep flipping pages back and forth as you go. This here, *right now*, is the final choice you will need to make. It is in fact the *only* choice you *get the opportunity* to make (other than of course to stop reading altogether, which we'll discuss later). So go ahead and make a selection below. Pick the **strategy for untying knots** that most appeals to you. A little more info from Sara Gaitsell's exhaustive research is provided below to help with your decision. Happy hunting!

Select	Strategy	Description
<input type="checkbox"/>	Twist the End and Push	Take one end of the material (rope, string, plastic bag, whatever it is) and twist it repeatedly. Once it is tightly bound, push the twisted end back through the loop that holds it. Voila!
<input type="checkbox"/>	Corkscrew	Find a place where you can insert the point of a corkscrew under some portion of the knot. Then turn the corkscrew over and over again to disentangle. Like magic!
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spoon Tap	Tap the knot with a heavy spoon, gradually loosening the connections and making it trivial to undo. It really works!
<input type="checkbox"/>	Understand then Unravel	Study the knot. Understand the inputs and outputs. Then methodically tease it apart based on its own peculiar logic. Slow and steady's the way to go with this option.
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Gordian Solution	Alexander the Great is said to have undone the famous Gordian Knot by either slicing it with his sword or drawing out the pole on which it was tied. This has come to represent a bold solution to a complex problem. Choose this option if that idea tickles your fancy as much as it apparently does Sara's.

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Using the gnawed pencil that came with the package,
our old man makes his choice.

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So do we.

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Back through the meandering house Jena Gaitskell goes. Rather than retracing Sam's steps through the kitchen, she takes a right after leaving the mudroom, eventually heading down a hallway decorated with wallpaper that seems out of place in the otherwise elegant home. The blue and yellow flowers on an off-white background seem to be from a different decorational era. Not that Jena cares. She keeps moving, following the hallway as it turns left, then right. After that final turn, it dead-ends in a heavy-looking door that is...very slightly ajar?

Jena stops short. That door is not supposed to be open. It is *never* supposed to be open. It's the door to her father's office, where he sees his "clients". Jena doesn't know what "clients" are. She has just come into the hallway to sulk and bemoan her own boredom. It is usually quiet in this hallway, so she does this sometimes. She can lean up against one of the walls and slide to the floor and sit with her arms draped over her knees and, as long as her father doesn't come by, no one will bother her.

The fact of the open door is so completely unexpected that it sets Jena's little heart racing. On the floor to the right of the door is a small white cylindrical machine that when running pumps out what the adults called "white noise". Jena's mom had explained to her a few times that it was there so that no one could hear what was being said in her father's office. Jena had also been told many times by both parents never to linger in the hallway when her dad was working, because, as she understood it, what went on in that room between him and his clients was private and consequential.

The depth and power of the curiosity that this circumstance had engendered in Jena's six-year-old mind -- this secret, inaccessible space, right here in their own home -- is hard to overstate. Over the years she had indulged in all manner of fantasies, some horrific, some comical, some barely coherent. At one point she had speculated that Santa's workshop itself, or some related elfish outpost, might lurk behind that door. In fact, as she stands in front of it now, that thought occurs to her again. It had never quite been disproven.

She turns to look behind her. Listens. She can't hear anything. Her father must still be in the living room, reading and talking to Sara. Sam is probably out the door by now, off to wherever he was headed. And Mom isn't around.

I won't stay in there long, she thinks. Just a minute.

Just to see.

And with that, Jena Gaitskell opens the door wide enough to step inside.

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Let's address the elephant in the room, shall we?

This cutesy way of me telling you your story has you wondering whether the ride will be worth the fare. Whether there's a point to any of it in the end. Am I right?

I mean, a boy who won't speak anything that is not written down beforehand? An old man alone in a room? A teenager researching knots? A young girl opening a forbidden door? Why should you care about any of them? Will their damage, their yearnings and resentments and regrets, their efforts to endure, make any difference to you in the end?

Take this little interjection you're presently reading. This sentence right here. And this one. To whom can we attribute them? Is this the anonymous author of *The Palace of Nowhere* talking? Or is it the narrator of the outer narrative that contains that mysterious book? Is it the "author"? Or someone else entirely? Precisely what kind of game is being played here, anyway? Are you being toyed with? Is this gimmicky bullshit just setting you up for disappointment and frustration?

It's understandable to find yourself asking yourselves such questions. And I'm sorry, but I can't guarantee you won't be dissatisfied in the end. If human history is any indication, what we've embarked upon together here won't be everyone's cup of tea.

But wait, I already said that, didn't I? There must be something about tea...

Anyway, it all comes down to choice.

Despite what you may have read elsewhere, Albert Einstein never did say that the most important decision we make is whether we live in a hostile or friendly universe. But someone did.

One crucially important detail that person left out, though, is that this isn't a one-time deal. Not by a longshot. It's a decision we all make every day, every moment.

We are making it right now. Now. And now.

On each page of every book (fiction, non-fiction, poetry, scripture, whatever) is recorded that one choice, made time and again, in situations big and small.

So a key question you (and you) need to ask yourself now (and now) is what kind of world it is that you've unknowingly entered here, with this story (whichever book you believe you're reading). Do you feel as if you are in good hands? Will you leave this place changed? And will that be a good thing?

I can't provide those answers for you. They are yours alone to supply.

One last thing, though. How about this one. Never mind who is talking. Who exactly, I mean who in the actual fuck, is listening? Hmm?

Chew on that one for a while.



The leap from the bridge is ungainly. It is not at all the elegant diver's pose he has envisioned. It is a clumsy fall with pinwheeling arms. One moment he stands on the ledge, and in the next he simply steps off,

With his stomach floating somewhere several meters above him, James squints into the wind, focused on the rapidly approaching river.

The phone rings. Rang. Whatever.

A long time after the odd voice on the other end of the phone has stopped its foolish talking, James lets the telephone drop to the kitchen floor.

The river rushing to meet him teems now with human figures, clothed in white and floating like buoys tethered to the bottom: a host of green-white faces raised in his direction; tangles of serpentine hair wafting like seaweed; small round mouths open as if in hymn. Some of the faces are familiar: his mother, his father, a coworker whose name he forgets.

That's when James realizes the bungee cord will not hold. It's either too long, too loose, or it will snap.

Vacuuming their living room for the first time after the funeral (again), he pulls the loveseat out from the wall, and a small paperback slips predictably from somewhere, landing on the carpet with that same soft *thunk*.

James (re)reads the cover: *Gateways to Other Realities*. One of Kim's books, one of the myriad New Age pseudo-mystical texts lying, half-read, around the house at all times.

He sits cross-legged in the middle of the living room floor, opens to the bookmarked page, and the passage he reads, through vision blurred by tears, imprints itself on his mind so vividly that he will conjure it up later (for instance, now) word for word:

"In Tibetan Buddhism there is bardo. Literally, the 'in-between'. A transitional condition or state, as may occur during meditation, or during the moment of dying, or in the gap between death and rebirth. Also sometimes during dreams. Pivotal moments, all, those upon which the direction of our lives, however many they may be, largely depend...Certain forms of meditation are used to reach this threshold, as are some hallucinogenic drugs. The point seems to be to go to the brink of death, or perhaps a little beyond, returning with the ability to walk between worlds. To bridge realities. To glimpse behind the curtain into the next room."

And so it would and does occur to James, eventually and now, again: That there is, that there might be, a Way. And that he might just try or have tried it.

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He has perhaps one second left to live by the time he re-opens his eyes. His bones, all of them, will snap like brittle twigs when they hit the water at this speed.

The faces are close to the surface now. They rise to greet him, holding out their arms and smiling. Kim is positively beaming. She might be crying. It is hard to tell. It all happens so fast.

James smiles, too, and opens wide his arms.

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There are costs to his border walking. Physical and otherwise.

After-effects, he will find, include dizziness, vertigo, and a confusing mixture of oddly combined tenses that leave him increasingly disoriented in his everyday life. He will also experience vague inexplicable limb pain, spatial disorientation, and her smiling face beneath a floppy white sun hat, specks of black potting soil dotting her pink nose and cheeks like

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freckles.

Kim walks up the steps of their back porch, small and sunburned in a blue tank top and shorts. The glittering lake and the late afternoon sun is at her back, and she is, oh my god wasn't she beautiful.

They kiss(ed): Lips gritty with dirt, sun-warmed faces, the exhaustion of a hard day at work in the garden melting away. He touches, touched the softness of her cheeks; breathes, breathed in the scent of her, deeply: damp earth, sweat, new life, and her hair, like berries.

She pulls back at some point, gently, big green eyes expanding. He had never seen eyes like this, before hers; perfectly round, huge, open.

Kim's eyes.

"They," she whispers, had whispered, always whispers, cupping her comical little pot belly with two small hands, "were going to love this house."

James knows this is wrong. Kim had said, dammit Kim says, "are". But he smiles and agrees, agreed anyway. He always agreed, agrees.

Then she dances awkwardly there on the porch, in the red-pink glow of the sun setting across the lake, and he was dancing too and laughing, at the two small dirty handprints on her blue tank top, on either side of her pregnant middle.

She is, was Kim: His very own, a pot-bellied gorgeous miracle with soft tiny hands and enormous eyes and a smile that went, goes on forever.

----●----

The bungee cord holds.

It does not snap. It is not too long, and it is not too loose. An instant before he hits the seething river, James feels a hard jerk on his ankles.

There is a fraction of a moment then, a bardo, an in-between, before the tautness of the cord begins to pull him upward. In that measureless span of time, he is close enough to feel the river's icy spray on his cheeks, mere inches from Kim's face in the water below. Reaching out for her, he feels the river swallow his finger tips. She stretches her hand toward his.

It is as if she is his reflection. His better half.

Then he is being taken away again, yanked upward violently. His body begins to spin and just before he loses sight of the river, Kim, her round face small now, purses her lips and blows him a kiss.

----●----

"Once not enough fer ya, huh?"

A lanky, suntanned kid takes a little blue ticket from James' hand. Spitting a mouthful of chaw over the side of the bridge, the boy shakes his head and grins, like he just knew it, like he had this guy pegged from the beginning. As he fastens the gear to James' ankles, he turns to his coworker, a girl collecting money and doling out tickets a few feet away.

"Hey Joanie. I think we got ourselves another addict here," he yells, gesturing at their latest repeat customer with a long thumb. He winks conspiratorially at James, gives him a hearty slap on the back.
"You're all set."

James nods, steps onto the ledge, and takes a deep breath, looking straight down into the river. Sunlight glances off the dark, moving current like the twinkling of stars. There's nothing unusual, no one else in the water; not yet.

"Hey I's just joshin' ya man," the kid calls from behind him. "We all know the feeling, bro."

No, James thinks, as he steps out,
off,
down.

I didn't, don't think that you did do.

—THE END—



Deirdre Gaitskell takes a deep breath and lays the thin stack of papers gently down on the small table beside her chair. She opens her pocket book and rummages, eventually extracting a tissue, with which she dabs her eyes. She snuffles, tucks the tissue back into the bag, and, finally, looks up.

A heavysset woman with an unruly head of frazzled brown hair and a pair of wide round glasses that match her wide round face sits behind a metal desk. A black nameplate with white etched letters that read “LIDICE CALLEY-WILLIAMS” on one line and “Guidance” on the next sits on the desktop between her and Deirdre. Next to it, steam pours from a midnight blue coffee mug with a brass-colored logo on one side. The logo is a depiction of a Native American brave in full dress. The brave is crouching and holding a spear as if preparing to use it.

“Mrs. Gaitskell,” Lidice says, her face creasing into an expression of clinical concern. “I hope you see why we called you in today, and why Mr. Baer and I found Sam’s story at least worth discussing. Do you agree?”

Deirdre glances at the young man seated in the chair to her right, then back at the counselor.

“I’m not sure I do,” she says.

“Well, we just felt, given the family history, there are some details in it...”

“It’s a story,” Deirdre breaks in. “A work of fiction. Besides, we all know writing is Sam’s only real mode of self expression. To be honest, it’s kind of nice to see him finally using it to work through his feelings. He needs to be able to do that; I think it’s healthy. I’m very appreciative of the fact that you’re being watchful, it’s important that you do that, so please don’t get me wrong. And I should thank you for calling that story to my attention. I think it’s...beautiful. But I don’t see why it would be a cause for concern.”

The two school officials exchange looks. Lidice takes a sip of her coffee. In the process of doing so, the mug is turned so that the words “Sand Creek High School - Go Warriors!” can be read on the side opposite the one with the brave on it. Baer speaks up.

“I agree with you, Mrs. Gaitskell,” he says. “The story is beautiful. But it also might be a cry for help. There is a young man in it *leaping* from a *bridge* after a tragic accident, in which twins are involved. There’s an express desire by the young man to engage in risky behavior, to nearly *die*, to allow himself to make contact with a loved one he has lost.

“I’m concerned that Sam may be telling us, in his own way, of something he is about to do. And I feel like it would be prudent of us to confirm that this is *not* the case, as best we can.”

Deirdre sits, blank-faced and silent, for a while, looking at the young teacher.

“And how would you like to do that?” she finally asks.

“We would just like your permission for us to speak with Sam, to talk more about the story,” says Lidice. “In an abundance of caution.”

“Fine. Thank you, Lidice. And Rick. Again. Is that all for today?”

The educators exchange another look.

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EXT. DEARBORN CEMETERY - DAY

Midday sun projects the slender shadow of SAM GAITSKELL and his bicycle onto rough pavement as he passes beneath a gray stone arch engraved with the words, *"As We Are Now, So You Too Must Be"*. Barely pedaling, cruising along in no apparent rush, Sam guides the bike through a contemporary graveyard, down a series of paved paths just wide enough to support a single car, with headstones and plots on each side. He reads the epitaphs on some of the stones as he passes them.

"All things change but God remains"

"Duty done, rest begun"

"Always in our thoughts, forever in our hearts"

After reading that last, Sam abruptly steps on the brakes. He puts his feet on the ground and lays the bike gently on the cement, then approaches the grave. The name on the stone is that of one Patrick Carr, and the dates are December 16, 1947- October 11, 1983. Once standing in front of Carr's memorial, Sam reaches down to pick up a small terracotta pot from which sprouts a clump of fresh pink pansies. Standing, he looks around in all directions, then walks back to his bike, where he places the pot gently into a silver metal basket behind the saddle.

He doesn't notice, but in the background behind him a small white stone juts like a sagging tooth from a patch of earth. The name on the stone has been worn to illegibility by time but its inscription is as crisp and vivid as if it had been engraved that very day.

"And so make life, death and that vast forever one grand sweet song"

Sam Gaitskell mounts his bike and moves deeper into the yard of borrowed bones.

↔

Part 2:

Causality



The door of Jay Gaitskell's office is still ajar, more so now than when Jena Gaitskell found it. The house is quiet.

Through that partly open door comes the sound of something heavy falling onto a carpet and breaking: a thud, followed quickly by a crack. Then a young girl's voice saying "No no no no nooooo." Some hurried activity takes place behind the door. Perhaps a minute later, a panicked Jena Gaitskell appears with quivering, terrified eyes. Slithering through the opening between the door and jamb, she closes the door softly behind her and scampers down the hall away from the scene.

At roughly the same moment, in the living room on the other side of a few walls, Sara Gaitskell leans her slender frame against the edge of the patio door, thumbs hooked into the pockets of her jeans, looking out onto the lawn, the glorious sunlit day. Her gaze is distant, thoughtful. Not turning away from the scene, she asks a question of her father, who is still sitting on the couch, reading.

"Dad, do you know about the archer in the meadow?"

"Hmm? I don't think so. Who's that?"

Sara sighs.

"It's a story. There's an archer in a meadow full of tall grass. Not really an archer but a novice. A woman, with a bow she's never used before, and a single arrow. A hundred yards away from the woman is a hill. She's never seen what lies on the other side.

The woman nocks the arrow and lifts her bow, pointing it in the direction of that hill. She draws the bowstring and, without putting a lot of care into aiming, she lets the arrow loose. Her form is perfect. The path of the arrow is gorgeous. The air whispers through the fletching as she watches it go. And the arrow flies toward that hill, and over it, until it disappears from sight.

The woman gathers her things and makes her way through the grass, heading in the direction the arrow traveled. When she gets to the hill, she climbs it and finally sees what's on the other side: a small target that's been driven into the soil. Her arrow has hit that target. Dead center. Bull's eye.

The question is: how could that possibly *be*?"

Sara stops talking, taking a deep breath and exhaling as she continues staring out the window. A lengthy silence ensues, broken only by the quiet ticking of a clock, the muted sound of birds in the yard.

Finally, Jay asks, without looking up from his magazine, "Is that it? Is that the whole story?"

Sara's eyes are shining now, wet. When she speaks her voice is soft.

"Yeah. Pretty much."

"I don't get it."

"Right. The point is, dad, we get taught all kinds of things. How to tie our shoelaces and brush our teeth and take a shit and wipe ourselves. How to say please and thank you and use a fork. How to read and write and talk. Everything in life requires some kind of training. Practice. Cooking, balancing a checkbook, playing a guitar. Archery. But even though no one teaches us one damn thing about it, there's one thing we all know exactly how to do. We all get it perfect, the one time we're asked to do it. All of us. Everyone who ever was. How can that be? How do we all just *know*?"

Jay Gaitskell stops reading his magazine. But a long time passes before he has the courage to look up from it.

When he finally does, he sees books upon books and pictures in frames. and a globe on a shelf. He takes in the slanting geometric patches of sunlight on the wood floor over by the patio door. Looking through the glass, he sees the branches of his favorite pine tree outside, dipping in a light breeze.

What he does not see is his daughter, Sara, a teenage girl who would never exist.

The ticking of the clock is suddenly deafening, and there is no one in the room to hear Jay Gaitskell as he begins to sob.

↔

Deirdre Gaitskell sits in the driver's seat of her parked BMW, hands on the steering wheel, staring out the windshield at sunlight brightening up green leaves on a cluster of trees in front of the car. The song "Twilight Zone," by Golden Earring, plays softly on the stereo.

Every so often the thumb on Deirdre's left hand lifts from the wheel, then slowly taps it as she looks in the rearview mirror. Behind her, a two-story building coated in light brown stucco catches the light. An abundant and colorful patch of shrubs and flowers blooms beneath its large first floor window, which looks out onto the wooded lot, and hanging plants adorn a pair of glass doors. Above those doors a sign reads, "Ganden Meditation Center."

Another car eventually appears, easing through the narrow entrance of the parking lot, pulling slowly into it, and parking next to the BMW. The driver, an older woman with close-cropped silver hair, shuts down the car and appears to rummage in her bag for a few moments before glancing in Deirdre's direction. She does a barely perceptible double take before smiling broadly and waving.

Deirdre raises a hand in reply and takes a deep breath. She twists the key in the ignition and removes it, silencing the music. Leaving her own phone on the passenger seat, she opens the driver's side door more or less in sync with the other driver.

"Deirdre! How wonderful to see you!"

Gravel crunches under the shoes of both women as they approach one another. The woman opens her arms and Deirdre steps somewhat reluctantly into an embrace. While the other woman beams warmly, Deirdre's smile is forced and awkward.

After a few moments, the woman steps back from the hug, keeping her hands on Deirdre, one on each upper arm. She finds Deirdre's eyes with her own.

"Welcome back, dear. It really is so good to see you,"

"Thank you, Becky," says Deirdre. "How...how have you been?"

"Oh, you know. Like anyone. Aging. One breath at a time."

They stand looking at one another without speaking. In the trees around them birds twitter.

“I think it’s wonderful that you’re here, Deirdre. I really do. We’ve missed you. I can’t imagine...anyway, everyone will be so very happy to see you, I’m sure. Come. It’s a beautiful afternoon. Let’s sit together.”

Deirdre nods. Visibly trembling, clearly on the verge of tears and finding it difficult to speak, she takes a couple of reluctant steps before pausing, staring at the ground. Becky drapes a thin arm around her friend’s shoulders and gently leads her toward the stairs, and up them, into the meditation center.

↔

↔

In this next scene, we see what the gravestone sees. Sam Gaitskell stands facing us, leaning on his left leg, open notepad in one hand, the pot of colored pansies in the other. Over his slender shoulders, a ways back, a wall of yellow birch trees looms. Between Sam and those trees are a couple of neatly arranged rows of newer looking graves.

"I, uh, found some poems I thought you might like," he says, and we take particular note of the fact that he is not reading from the pad but rather appears to be speaking extemporaneously.

"And flowers," he adds, leaning down and carefully placing the pot on the grass in front of us. *"These ones are for thoughts."*

Sam shifts his balance to the other leg and back again, shrugs his shoulders, and looks around at the empty graveyard. A strand of dark hair dangles down over his forehead like a comma, and the breeze is making it shiver.

"Okay, here goes with the poetry. This one's from someone named ISSA."

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun."

↔

↔

When the novice asked the master whether there were any practical benefits of insight into the storytelling nature of the mind, the master replied with a question of his own.

"Imagine that a man has been struck by an arrow. Will he experience pain?"

"Yes, of course," said the novice.

"And if in response he then stabs himself with a second arrow of his own making, would his pain then be worse?"

"Yes."

"Well, there you go," the master said, and went back to carving his flute.

↔

"More poetry," says Sam.

you then asia

The infants will not shut up. Their crying? Incessant. Their shrieking? Inescapable. I would choke them silent, every last one, for a single moment of peace. Even - yes I'll say it, the time for niceties and euphemisms is long past - even my little Maria, whose small voice I can no longer pick out from the din.

But I cannot choke what I cannot touch, and I cannot touch what no longer is. I am left with no choice but to bear witness to their wailing, to them - always hungry, gassy, lonely, scared; always something. I picture a massive bird's nest teeming with a mob of small blind baby faces. Hungry seeking mouths open. Uvulas thrashing like punching bags.

At other times (often) the tumult blocks any ability I might have to form a coherent image in my mind's eye at all.

The adults among the voices have needs unaddressed as well, questions unanswered, fears unquelled. Some articulate them. Some are kind and soft-spoken, alternately inquisitive and helpful. Others rant and vent and threaten vengeance. But one thing appears to have become commonly agreed upon among them.

The burning, as one named Luis told me the other day, a harsh disembodied male whisper in my mind speaking in English with a street Latino accent, while I sat alone in my cramped kitchen sipping lukewarm tea: *keep it up*.

#

Popular opinion holds that the last person to have perished in the traditional sense in the United States of America was a 74-year old man named Dennis Colvin, who suffered a heart attack in his home in Tallahassee, Florida, and was declared dead, yes, dead, gloriously dead by doctors in the emergency room to which he was conveyed in an ambulance.

Mr. Colvin's story was the first item presented by every major television newscast that evening. In most markets afternoon programming was interrupted by a special report on his demise. A photograph of Mr. Colvin graced the front page of every major national newspaper the next morning. The New York Times ran a headline declaring "Man dies of heart attack in Florida."

That was nearly four months ago.

#

The government knows nothing about why this is happening. Or claims it knows nothing. They stack them now one on the other in so-called "hospitals," morgues, really. Tens of thousands placed into cold sterile buildings to, what? Rot? They won't even do that.

#

For those many who prefer to deny the existence of the phenomenon being labeled 'Idiopathic Post-Mortem Persistence,' the tabloid headlines in the supermarket checkout line are a relentless assault.

"Mad Genius Behind Immortality Epidemic Identified" (just below this, the photo of a 1970's television drama star, so wizened and gray as to be nearly unrecognizable)

"Is Heaven Closed?"

The checkout clerk neglects to ask me for my Pit Stop Card.

#

Just imagine:

You are an expecting first-time parent. You spend the better part of nine months worrying yourself to the brink of insanity about all of the things that could potentially go wrong. You have half a dozen close friends who have had children with no major complications, you and your husband are healthy and ready, yet you reach the brink of panic daily thinking about one catastrophe or another. Still birth. Infection. An accident on the way to the hospital.

Then the day comes.

Your daughter is born barely alive, choked to the point of death by her own mother's - your - umbilical cord during labor. Her vital signs barely register: an extremely weak pulse, only sporadic breathing. She is a deep shade of blue. She does not, cannot, cry.

You hear a nurse whisper: "This one has no chance."

Your baby, Maria, you'd named her in the womb almost two months previous, is placed on life support. Machines breathe for her, feed her, handle her waste, while you wait for the moment when the breathing will stop. The doctors' prognosis offers little in the way of hope.

Yet she persists. Maria's condition, such as it is, stabilizes. Her vital signs, having reached the very precipice of death, persist. For weeks, nothing changes. Her weight does not change more than an ounce either way; her height is constant as well. She shows no signs whatsoever of developing. Or of dying.

Maria persists.

To the hospital staff you and your husband seem like good people, as do most people hit hard by tragedy. You stay by her side faithfully, praying quietly, crying often. You treat the nurses well, unleashing very little of your angry grief in their direction. And you wait.

Eventually you can wait no longer. The doctors admit to being stumped, unsure of exactly what is happening to your child. The prospect of detaching the machines is broached. You angrily resist for a long time. Two months.

Then, after no change whatsoever, you agree to take the machines away and let nature take its course. You and your husband hold hands as, with a flick of an orange switch, the physician sentences your child to death.

You cry, deep wrenching sobs, but Maria's condition does not change. She still breathes once an hour or so, her heart beats once a minute, she does not vacate her bowels, does not eat or drink, her brainwave activity is so low as to indicate that she is moments from death.

But it never comes.

Maria persists.

#

Soon thereafter the news reports start, hinting that others may be sharing a similar fate to Maria. Mostly children at first, then older people. The same scene plays itself out a thousand, ten thousand times: A person becomes deathly ill. His or her progression towards death continues as expected, until there is just one more step to be taken to end the suffering. That step never comes.

They persist. Soon everyone does. The global death rate falls, plummets, and finally, reaches zero.

No one is dying anymore, anywhere.

#

The prospect of some kind of a virus is broached. Perhaps biological warfare. Victims are quarantined in government buildings in rural areas. They quarantine Maria.

The thought of my dear sweet child stuck forever in such a place drives me to the brink of madness, and past it, and so it begins.

After I burn the first building down, with Maria and dozens like her in it, the voices start. For some reason I seem to be able to hear them while others do not, these homeless souls newly freed from useless bodies, in-betweeners unsure not only of their future but their present.

They never sleep. Neither do I. The infants never stop crying. Neither do I.

We persist.

#

The woods around me are imbued with an orange, flickering glow, provoking animated shadow dances among the trees. Before me, two more 'hospital' buildings are engulfed in flames, burning like a sacrifice to long-vanished gods, a massive funeral pyre.

I sit alone, but a lunatic frenzy of voices shares the chilly air around me with the smoke and embers. Harsh whispers of lips inches from my ear, threats and lusty vows, deferential gratitude and mirth, mad cackling laughers running like brook water through the trees behind me. Glee hope venom and freedom. A thousand other sensations, but freedom above all. Fire and freedom and an unknown, untemplated future.

I sit still, my back propped against an old tree, bearing the brunt of the insults hurled at me from thin air, absorbing the gushing thanks expressed from the same source, waiting, for what I have no idea.

Sirens, distant but rapidly drawing nearer. Fire engines and police cars. They are too late, of course. As am I. As are we all.

But the burning, the bodiless whisper in my ear.

Keep it up.

So there it is.
Where the gone things go.
And how to get them back.
Tada.
Get it?
Or do you need more context?
OK, fine. I am not above name-dropping.
Let's ask Jesus.⁴
And also answer him.



The Three Lost Things: Luke Fifteen

Verse 3: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"

Verses 8-9: "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'"

Verses 11-32: The lost or prodigal son. A man has two sons. One son takes some of his father's money, leaves home, and lives a wild life, eventually becoming impoverished. He returns home and his father immediately joyfully embraces him, throwing him a party.

So.

Would *you* leave ninety-nine sheep under your care "in the open country" to seek one that strayed? Really?

And how would *you* react if someone you knew lost a coin and then was so happy, and focused on material wealth, that she called all her friends and neighbors because she found it? All that joy? Over a fucking coin?!

You lost something. Someone, maybe. And you want them to come back to you. You have no control over whether this happens, or when, or how. The only thing you do have control over is what they will find if and when they do return. *Who* they will find.

⁴ The Big Guy. Or one of them. We can ask the Others too. Maybe we'll do just that.

You.

Can you keep your fire lit? Can you keep the burning up? Can you treat the past like spider webs that tickle, not chains that bind and hurt, and simply forget rather than “forgive”⁵ whatever it is that has happened that you in your infinite wisdom regard as ‘evil,’ so that you can immediately embrace the gone-but-now-returned one joyfully, and have a party with no time wasted or clouds dampening the bliss?

Because see, here’s how it is: the gone thing isn’t whatever the thing you think is the gone thing.

The gone thing is you, grasshopper.

It’s been you all along.

⁵ (oh, aren’t you special)

It's called Christ's Passion for a reason.

Death	Heaven	Birth	Life
'Good' Friday	Holy Saturday	Easter Sunday	Holy Thursday
Christ dies	Christ in the tomb	Christ re-born	Last Supper. Agony in the Garden. Capture.
The cross is the tree of knowledge of 'good' and evil.	Christ is a fetus in a womb.	Emerging from a tomb is emerging from a womb.	A 'naked lad' flees the scene when the 'authorities' come.
Death, by stopping the brain, erases memory. All past 'sins' vanish, leaving the dead person unhaunted, unburdened, and therefore <i>poor in spirit</i> .	The fetus, which <i>hungers and thirsts</i> incessantly for <i>natural, divine</i> righteousness, is filled by its mother with exactly that, everything it needs, in this peaceful, nurturing place.	The newborn babe, after <i>persecution for the sake of (maternal, divine) righteousness</i> in the form of labor, is <i>pure of heart, seeing God</i> in everything: itself, other people, the natural world, because its library of metaphors is empty. It sees things as they truly are. ⁶ It is <i>meek</i> to the doings of the world and its own inclinations, crying when its hungry, shitting and pissing whenever it has the urge to do so. Not agonizing over whether these things are ok or correct, it is <i>at peace with its own nature</i> .	Eating. Dreaming. Praying. Kissing. Also judging, agonizing over the future, tolerating injustice out of fear. Losing our child self (like Adam and Eve being driven from the Garden of Eden) by deferring to external authority, unnatural righteousness, which is a betrayal. We become filled with an <i>externally derived</i> sense of righteousness, meek to authority, less merciful, hiding our emotions, to avoid persecution by others and make peace with what may be a corrupt status quo.

⁶ Ever stare into the eyes of a brand new, newborn baby, only moments old? I have. And what I have to say about it is this: I look into the eyes of a baby. The blood of children only ever runs like children's blood. Anything I could possibly add to it would just fuck it up. Matt 5:3-12. Mark 14:51-52. Gen 2:25.

How to meet the Great Pumpkin

by Charles Wolfgang Tuomi

Coziness matters
so make the blanket ❤️ warm and soft:
the more precious and elaborate the better.

Spend your whole spring knitting it and
drape it over your shoulder in summer.

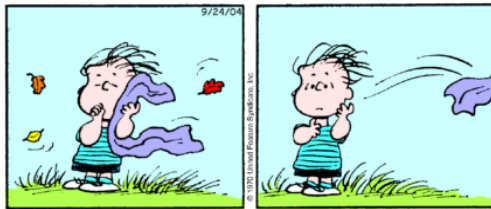
Clutch the blanket tightly and
hold it close at all times.

Do whatever you can
to prevent others
from handling it.

Call it life 🧡.

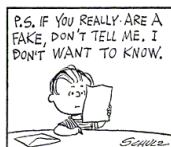
When autumn comes
walk trusting
toward the field.

Give the blanket one last squeeze 🤗
before relaxing your grip 🙌 and
letting it go.



Note the careless way the wind carries it off.
The way leaves flutter.
The way love letters tumble from towers.

Then enter the patch and sit sincerely.
Breathe 🧘 and listen to the hush of stems.
Feel the cool soil beneath you and
the easy way it yields
as you take root.



↔

When the novice asked the master whether there were any practical benefits of insight into the storytelling nature of the mind, the master replied with a question of his own.

“Imagine that a man has been struck by an arrow. Will he experience pain?”

“Yes, of course,” said the novice.

“And if in response he then stabs himself with a second arrow of his own making, would his pain then be worse?”

“Yes.”

“Well, there you go,” the master said, and went back to carving his flute.

↔

Up Next.

“Parabolas of Weeds”