

Epilogue

What am I to say about two brothers whose wives have argued, who are thus forced by their immediate loyalties not to speak to each other? Or the surgeon—in love with the deftness of his hands and the choreography of his fingers amid the vital slime of human life—who has sadly set his scalpel aside, his passion imperiled by muscular degeneration? Or the woman who refuses to act on her own desires because she is attracted to a married man, one who represents moral integrity and uprightness of heart? What can I say but repeat the usual clichés: that life is indeed a garden of pain, that men and women are born for trouble and heartache, and that the lyricism of experience is nothing but a chimera of our most fraudulent desires?

That the world which seems to lie before us like a land so various, so beautiful, so new, etc., etc., is in reality a smoking landfill, one that exacts its own price for the dumping of a load?

Why bother, why bother saying anything at all?

Let us say, instead, that one hot June morning, the dew even at five-thirty already burned away, Len Farrington returns from his daily run sweaty and happy, illuminated by the sunrise and pleased by his own virtue to find his brother, with whom he has not spoken in a year and a half, sitting on the bench to his front porch.

"Frog," his brother says, using a nickname he hasn't heard since his childhood, "how you can sweat like that, I'll never know."

His older brother, Max, pudgy and uncomfortably Episcopalian in his short-sleeved black shirt and white collar, is the very image and picture of grief. His forehead is creased by anxiety, his eyes are clouded with preoccupation. Ever since he and Max stopped talking out of deference to Sylvia and Patrice, Len has known intuitively that Max's life is nothing he would trade for. He knows that he and Sylvia are miserable, their lives circumscribed by her cycle of antidepressant and sleeping pills. He knows that Max harbors resentment toward his parishioners, with their savage and selfish complaints, their dull needs, springing as they do from their twin tragedies of loneliness and dread. He once envied Max his sense of calling; he does so no longer.

"Sweat's a blessing," he says now, using his brother's language. He chooses to ignore the recent history that hangs between them. Instead, he focuses with pride upon the bright front of his white house, the gleam of newly painted black shutters. "After a run, I've drained all the poisons out of my soul as well as my flesh," he says. And then he adds, "No offense."

His brother visibly winces at the word "soul," as if Len does not possess the qualifications for its utterance. *Fuck him*, Len thinks. *Fuck him* and his black shirts of depression, his white collar of propriety. It is an anger that suffuses his whole body with radiant heat, an emotion he rarely permits and never expresses. He cannot know that Max only winces whenever the language of his trade reminds him of his own shortcomings. He cannot know that even now Max is thinking that he—Leonard Farrington, in-

dependent insurance agent representing all lines of life, home, and auto, the Frog Man of their childhood now thirty years in the past, so named for his refusal to touch their slimy green bodies, his general refusal to dirty himself—that he would have made the better priest.

"Maybe I shouldn't be here," Max says, looking to the pale, flat sky, his round face gone gray in dawn's twilight. "But I've needed to tell someone."

"Tell who what?"

It is here that Max buries his head with its few pale threads of sandy-colored hair in his hands, groaning from that well of human despair located just below the diaphragm, "I'm in love." This last syllable of misery still hangs in the rising heat of the morning when Patrice, as if on cue, steps outside onto the porch for the morning paper.

"Love," she sniffs, her eyes still smudged by last night's mascara, "the most highly overrated thing on God's green earth." She pulls her flowered housecoat more tightly around herself, picks up the paper, and snaps free the rubber band with a whack that echoes along the quiet street like pistol fire. She steps inside the house again, leaving in her wake nothing, not a word, not a greeting, not a single acknowledgment for this brother-in-law she would rather not see.

"Maybe I shouldn't be here," Max says again. "Maybe I shouldn't have come. It was a bad idea. A bad idea from the start."

"No, no, Maxie. You're here. After all this time. And you're in . . ." He can hardly think of the language for it. "You're forty-three years old."

"And in love. Again. Fat and stupid and terminal with love."

"And married. Still."

"Yes. Well."

"Well? And Sylvia?"

"I'm not in love with Sylvia."

He says this with such utter seriousness, such Episcopalian gravity, and yet with such obvious adolescent misery commingled with joy that Lennie can't help himself. He laughs. If Max knew how pitiful he looked, how pleased with himself, he would be mortified. This is not the first time that Maxie, resonant with

Episcopalian rectitude, has listened to the dictates of his hormones rather than the doctrine of his church. He has, after all, known his share of organists and secretaries, the bored and the lonely. But now, this affair of his heart has left him so miserable and so moved, so emotionally elevated, that on his walk over this morning he was nearly driven to his knees by the sight of a young woman riding in the bed of a pickup truck; in the glossy heft of her auburn hair he could see, he is sure, all the promises of eternal life. In matters of yearning, in short, he has the emotional stability of a fourteen-year-old girl.

"So," Len finally says, "who is it?"

"No one," Max says. "No one you know. A woman named Virginia."

"You want to come in?" Len asks.

Max shakes his head. Patrice and Sylvia, although unseen, are present nonetheless. A failed counseling partnership has left the sisters-in-law, registered marriage-family therapists, embittered and angry, their anger extending to the respective families. They were client-poor but asset-rich. Office furniture decorates both houses. Three feet from Len's front door, a cherry-wood rolltop stands accusingly. A couch, upholstered in industrial-grade fabric, faces Max's fireplace. It exudes the false cheer and real pain of waiting rooms.

"No," he says, "I better not."

"Come on." Len pulls his brother's arm. "Patrice won't mind. Have some breakfast."

"No." Max's face brightens for a moment. "Let me buy you breakfast." He names the coffee shop on the corner. "A brother can buy his brother breakfast, right?"

Doubtful now, Len checks his black runner's watch. "I've got an eight-thirty meeting." He checks the watch again. "Oh hell, I'll cancel the meeting. But I've got to shower."

"I'll get us a table. Eggs sunny-side up, hash browns, rye toast?"

Len shakes his head. His brother has named his breakfast of the past, as if it had come from a time capsule. "Oatmeal. Half a grapefruit."

"That's not a—"

Len raises a hand before Max can go further. "My cholesterol's

at 215, my blood pressure's a little high, and I'm eight pounds over my goal weight. I'm forty-one years old, and I'm trying not to fall apart. You get to do the funerals, but I have to write the checks."

"Okay, oatmeal. Half a grapefruit. How about some prune juice? Maybe some Geritol? A Maalox and Metamucil shake? A hair shirt to every fifth unhappy customer."

"Get out of here. I'll meet you." He steps through the doorway into darkness. "Go on, Maxie, I'll meet you."

After the door closes, Max waits for just a minute on the front porch. The sky is cloudless, the dome of the world shaded from black to azure to aquamarine. Bands of pink and red outline the mountains in the east. By noon it will be nearly white, a furnace. This is not an easy land in which to live, he thinks. Their family moved to central California when he was five, and he has not yet come to an accommodation. It does not lend itself easily to either liturgy or reflection. The routines of habit are not appreciated, and thought—under such merciless glare—is nearly impossible. Sex, however, is a banquet. And the sky a metaphor for judgment. So, to the coffee shop he walks, wearing sunglasses against the promises of the dawn and murmuring, "We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord," in defiance.

Patrice stands in front of their bathroom mirror, outlining her lips. She wears one towel like a turban, another as a wrap. The thought strikes Len that the probability of his standing his brother up could be measured in the thickness of terry cloth and gym shorts. But when he turns the tap for his shower, Patrice also turns: "Do you mind not doing that while I'm here?" she asks. "It's steamy enough as it is."

So he goes to the shower built in to one corner of the garage and curses the cold cement under his feet. The water begins hot, then peters out to lukewarm while he is midshampoo. Patrice, he thinks, wiping soap from his eyes. Goddammit. Goddammit to hell. Ever since the collapse of their office and her estrangement from Sylvia, Patrice has been a different person. She took a state job, issuing counseling and prenatal care information to teenagers

who look at her with bemused and barely tolerant expressions. She hates them. They remind her too clearly of how fine the line is between success and failure. Patrice now speaks of retirement as her career objective; her résumé is a ticket to old age. And as the cold water drains from his legs, Len once again feels a surge of anger that his money, the sweat from his brow, must be used to pay loans for a business that no longer exists. He has an urge to chop the rolltop desk into kindling.

She is dressing when, irked and shivering, Len enters their bedroom. From behind he can discern only the barest outline of the woman he married seventeen years ago. He imagines that he hears his son and daughter begin to stir. They are the children that he and Patrice never bothered to conceive except as jokes, images of misfortune they've avoided. When the toilet clogs, they blame it on the second child they never had. Would real children have made life worse than this? he wonders. Have they been telling a joke on themselves?

His life could be worse, an honest-to-god nightmare, but he can't at the moment imagine how. His work is routine; his material needs are met. His neighbors are kind and, in a pinch, when they observe true need, generous. Although abstracted and unsatisfied, his wife says that she loves him. But there are those unpredictable moments, when a voice breathes the word *Tahiti* into his ear, when he imagines himself as Gauguin. How ludicrous when, in truth, he looks forward to the next appearance of the Victoria's Secret catalogue. Why, he wonders for the umpteenth time, does his brother the priest seem to understand matters of sex, of having what one wants, better than himself? Why has he been chosen as the virtuous one? He cannot imagine the next thirty years except as a gradually steeper descent. Could anything be worse than the dull ache of killing time in this world?

In such a mood, he watches as Patrice packs her brassiere.

"Don't watch," she says. "It ain't pretty."

She shrugs herself into a blouse, steps into a jumper, choosing clothes as cover for her multitude of sins.

"So how is Max?" she begins again. "And how is the poor bastard's wife?"

By chance Max meets a parishioner in the parking lot of Gaylord's. Dr. Klinefelter has been retired for seven years, ever since he diagnosed himself as suffering from multiple sclerosis. The disease has worked quickly. He walks now with twin canes in a jerking, spasmodic, hitch-hop gait. His hands resemble talons; his mouth twitches between words. Dr. Klinefelter has attended St. James's, Max's parish, for thirty years—long before Max was on the scene—and Max measures his Sundays by Klinefelter's lurchings, as if the condition of the older man's debility were a barometer of his own unrest. He counts the doctor's illness as one complaint that is entirely verifiable, distinguishing him in this regard from the dozens of complaints that are intangible—either emotional or purely imagined for the sake of having something, anything at all, to say.

"Don't eat the hash." The doctor grunts as he settles himself into the booth by the door. An old joke—they first met when Max had food poisoning. "Try the waffle," the doctor advises. "Safer."

"The waffle it is."

The doctor places his hand on Max's arm. "I have a riddle for you, Father. How can Paul consider the law to be an agent of death when it is by the law that sin is made known and the grace of God is made both necessary and manifest? Is the law then not an agent of life by virtue of its role as the causation of grace?"

Max smiles. "You're more argument than I can handle."

He knows that Klinefelter will be unsatisfied without an answer, but Max has no intention of exegeting Paul's thesis in his letter to the Romans. Max gently refuses the doctor's offer to share his booth. Klinefelter is widowed and childless, lonely as well as crippled. Any other morning, Max would be glad to eat breakfast with him. His mind is as sharp as any scalpel, and he is a devoted, albeit untrained, student of theology. But any other morning is not the occasion of a reunion with one's brother, especially when that reunion is occasioned by one's latest announcement of infidelity and a continuing absence of principle.

"You be good, Father Farrington," the doctor says, "or I'll open you up."

He makes a slicing motion with his shaking right hand.

"Goodness," Max says, fully aware of all the attendant ironies, "is a vocational risk."

His conscience buried for months, Max has not allowed himself to think about the ramifications for himself or for Sylvia; he is still thinking only of his desire rather than its consequence.

Max goes to the bathroom to wash his hands. Pilate could do no more. In the one stall, another man is on his knees. He is throwing up in great, shuddering heaves.

"Are you all right?" Max calls. "Is there something I can do?"

"No, no," the other man sings out—cheerfully, Max thinks—before another surge hits him. "I need to get to work anyway."

Leaving this non sequitur unexplained, the other man rises and throws the bolt on the stall door. He holds the metal frame as if to steady himself. Flecks of vomit dot his shirt, his sport coat looks slept in, and the whites of his eyes have turned muddy as swamp water. He exudes the odor of alcoholic decay.

"You're okay?" Max asks. As a member of clergy and as one who feels his own personal compromises keenly, he takes this human responsibility to be an absolute. The parable of the Good Samaritan was successfully drilled into him as a child, that to be one more ordained failure is too much to consider or bear.

"Tip-top," the other man says. "Absolutely."

He aims himself for the sinks, and Max moves out of his way.

"If you're sure," Max says.

"Of course. Absolutely. Sorry you had to witness that." He buries his head in the sink and opens the valve wide. Spray jets everywhere.

"It's quite all right," Max hears himself say.

This courtly graciousness has become a little strange, and he edges out of the bathroom, flagging down a girl in an apron before he sinks into his own booth. Sabrina is printed on her name-tag. He gives his brother's meager order as well as his own, then stops the girl with one hand on her arm. "Do you know that man?" He tilts his head toward the bathroom door, from which the other man has just now emerged, his hair sticking up in several wet, unruly spikes.

The girl wrinkles her nose. "Yeah, he's one of ours." Her face darkens. "Pathetic," she says. "You expect better of people. You wanna take him home? Reform him? It's okay by me."

"I just wondered."

He sits down to wait for Len. His brother has surprised him. While he knows there is no love lost between Sylvia and Patrice, he expected greater shock from Lennie, his puritan brother. Moral outrage. Judgment. Castigation.

As if to answer this question, the sun frees itself fully from the rim of mountains to the east, and its full potency pours through the plate glass windows next to the booths. The harsh light has the force of a fist, and Max turns his head away. So this is the answer, this stark exposure. The bank of windows has become all glare, and Sabrina busies herself, lowering blinds, pivoting louvres. Before she can arrive at his window, however, Max has turned back to the fire, opening his eyes, thinking, *Give me your worst, go ahead*, knowing full well that the worst has not even begun to occur.

As it happens, Len is not the first to meet Max. Virginia has beaten him to it. She is desperate with virtue. She called his home only to hear Sylvia's sleep-thick, pill-disfigured voice; she disguised her own, hoping to sound like an elderly church member, but Sylvia evidently doesn't care that a woman might be calling for Max. She doesn't know where her husband is, he could be anywhere, she says, and it is obvious that she only wants this bothersome caller to go away. Virginia called St. James's and listened to a recorded message announcing the times of worship. But then she called his brother's number, the number just above Max's in the phone book, a long shot at best she knew, but there it was: Patrice, much more cheerful, more accommodating than Sylvia, told her about Gaylord's.

So when Len enters the coffee shop, he first sees Max and Max's worried look, and then when Max stands—a polite gesture that he doesn't, at first, understand—he sees the glossy dark hair in the seat opposite Max's.

"Lennie," Max says, looking at the other tables, glad that there are not too many others besides Klinefelter to observe this moment: an older woman with a grandson, both eating pancakes; two men at the counter, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes;

the drunk from the bathroom, his hands tentatively raising a glass of water to his lips. Max nervously shifts from foot to foot, hands restlessly jingling his change in his standard, diocese-issue pants. "I'd like you to meet Virginia. Virginia, my brother, Lennie Farrington."

Her eyes are red, and Lennie is struck by these twin facts: first, that this woman is so young, and second, that his brother could mean so much to so beautiful and so young a woman as to be the cause of her tears and unhappiness.

In fact, she has just told Max that this will never work. They were fools ever to think it would. In the first place, she has realized that she loves him *because* he's a minister; she's attracted to men, she knows this now, who represent stability and order, the sanctity and meaning of human life.

"Don't you see," she said, "if I get any further involved with you, I'll start being the *cause* of evil in the world?" When she said this, her nostrils quivered as if she were about to cry, and it was all Max could do not to leap across the table and tackle her, force her down onto the vinyl seat, his coffee shop Leda. To tell her in the language of sex that she had it all wrong—he was neither stable nor pure. She couldn't begin to corrupt him. But would saying that undo the attraction all the more certainly? He could feel a headache begin its bloom behind his eyelids.

"And truthfully," she added, "I think I just may be nutty about the uniform. You know, the vestments, all that brocade. The Eucharist at Passiontide." And here she did begin to cry.

Which was when Lennie entered, to shake her warm hand, to marvel at this young woman's presence, to feel the pulse beating steadily at her wrist, to wonder all over again what she could possibly see in this fat, confused older brother of his who once again is the perfect picture of misery caused—Len can see it now—by the pure pain of loss. He feels sorry for Max. He can't help it. Even as he's glad that such a messy situation might be so easily resolved.

They are each given a moment of reprieve when Sabrina comes with their orders. Virginia snuffles, says she must go. Max says, "No, wait." And to his brother, he says: "We met at the movie theater, did I tell you that? At *The Fisher King*?"

"No," Lennie says, "I hadn't heard that."

"Isn't that right?" Max says to Virginia.

"I have to go."

Sabrina has placed Lennie's breakfast in front of Max; Max's plate has landed in front of Lennie—scrambled eggs, sausage links, hash browns, a biscuit and gravy. Intent on the byplay in front of him, he puts a sausage in this mouth without thinking and is in the act of swallowing when the taste of pork grease hits him. When he tries to spit it out, it happens: he chokes. This piece of pork makes the roller-coaster ride over the top of his dumb, half-asleep glottis and wedges itself into his airway like a cork—*thunk*—the sound of suction audible in his own ears.

"No, please," Max is saying. "Stay a little longer. We need to talk."

"No." She's crying again, dabbing at her eyes with a paper napkin.

"I'll call you, then."

"Please don't."

"I need you. I haven't talked to my brother for years, but here we are—I had to tell him about you. You're good for me."

His mention of Lennie reminds them that this is a scene with an audience, but when they look at him, everything changes, everything else is forgotten. His face is red, nearly bursting. Soft, squeaking noises come from his wide-open mouth. His hands are at his throat. This has come as such a surprise that Lennie has had no chance to panic or thrash around. His body is rigid with confusion and puzzlement. In front of him are Max and his maybe/maybe-not girlfriend, and their faces begin to twist and run; he cannot get a fix on color or shape.

"Doctor Klinefelter!" Max is screaming from somewhere far off. "My brother! Look!"

The doctor rises slowly to his feet, pushes himself forward on his canes. "Heimlich," the old man says. "Do the Heimlich."

Max dimly remembers descriptions from television and magazines. He pulls his brother to his feet, his fists underneath Lennie's breastbone. His efforts are spasms of anxiety. Lennie squeaks, his face the color of wine. Max feels tears of failure falling onto his brother's shoulders. He has wasted his own life on riddles and tootsies, tootsies and riddles, and by the queerest sense of divine fairness, it is his brother who is going to die.

Doctor Klinefelter fumbles in his large pockets, extracts a silver penknife. "Hold him good," he says, pulling the stiff blade free.

It is the one thing Lennie sees, the bright bead of light from the silver blade as it erratically moves toward the hollow of his throat, that blocked conduit of life-giving air.

He does not review his life, nor does he think with fond regret of Patrice. He does not ask forgiveness for his often-uncharitable spirit. He only has room in his consciousness for the bright silver blade and the bright pinpoint of light that burns his eyes.

"Hold him now," the doctor says.

"Oh God, oh God," Max says, then yells to Virginia: "Call 911."

But then Lennie feels his legs go out from him. Has his brother dropped him? If he could just get some air, he will cry for this, he knows it. For his pain. For the unfairness. That Maxie the minister, his oversexed, irresponsible older brother, is the one who will get to live. And now other arms are around his ribs.

Max has not dropped Lennie. The drunk from the bathroom has shouldered the doctor and his knife aside and pushed Max into Virginia's lap. He takes a large, sour breath and jerks so hard that Lennie's ribs crack. The sausage flies across the room in a weightless arc, a lazy pop fly through a clear summer's day.

Lennie comes to in the sour draft of his rescuer. As his eyes clear, he believes that God looks like Christopher Lloyd, that he has died only to be revived into an odor of piss and rotten shellfish. Max is holding one of Lennie's hands in both of his own and crying. "Oh, dear sweet Jesus," he says over and over again, the strangest sort of mantra for this most professional of Episcopalians. "Oh, dear sweet Jesus, it was all my fault."

"Let him have his air," Doctor Klinefelter says, his tone critical of the stranger, who, although ignorant and unwitting, has succeeded where sobriety and knowledge failed.

The man from the bathroom stall stands. The color drains from his face, he looks about to faint, but he edges backward, surrendering himself into the waiting lap of an empty booth, and the critical moment passes.

Others now cluster quietly around their little group. Sabrina has come with water. The Vietnamese short-order cook flaps his apron, working a breeze.

Virginia quietly leaves. She touches Max's shoulder with two fingers, leaving him with her blessing, although at this moment she is forgotten. He will, she knows, think of her later. But by then, she will seem only like a remembered hurt, a pain from the past.

For now though, Max cries. Lennie breathes. Breathing, for the moment, is sufficient.

The front door opens, admitting a gust of sunlight and a large, startled trucker. All these people on the floor, he must think, what is he walking into here? The door closes. Cut off, the light burns everyone's eyes for long moments after it no longer exists.

"The frog man," Lennie croaks, patting his brother's arm, "the frog man lives."

Grace caroms around the room with the velocity of hockey pucks.

What am I to say to such things? That this is a small story after all? I suppose it is; I can't call it otherwise, even with its few moments of danger and risk. It would not even make a credible subplot for an hour-long courtroom drama. Two brothers, their wives, the young idealistic love interest, the aging doctor, the purple, bloated face of the virtuous victim. The improbable savior, a drunken *deus ex machina*. How can we believe it? What am I to say?

That on that early June morning I had just sat down at a booth in Gaylord's coffee shop, unsteadily holding a water glass to my lips when a man began to choke? That I had most recently knelt down, my head inside a toilet bowl, vomit burning my esophagus? That my week's odyssey had begun when my wife and daughter and son packed our station wagon with the barest essentials, saying enough is too much, before driving west into the harsh central California sun? That I had begun to believe that if our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting, then the dreams of this life are nightmares only?

I could say that, I suppose. But then, I could just as easily claim that I am Lennie or Max, or Doctor Klinefelter or Virginia, for that matter. That these multiple lives are merely fractions of one

life. I could say that in the moment when I fell backward into the booth at Gaylord's—my vision blurred by strange clarity, by the fluttering of some ethereal curtain—that I saw in those figures before me my own life revealed, my own apocalypse, an uncovering, a lifting of a veil. I could say that. Absolutely . . .

Yet why not say what happened? That and merely that.

That in those dark hours before our early dawns, I would wake to hear the sounds of our house: my wife, her back to me, muttering in her sleep, confused even in her slumber over what was to be done with me—with my rages, my silences, my criticisms, my depressions, my sarcasm, my self-loathing; my daughter turning over, restless in the rush of change even now overtaking her; my son crying out against the terrors of the darkness. I would wake to the distress of these sounds, stripped of any capacity for compassion, overwhelmed only by the realization that I could no longer remember the slightly fetid taste of a particular girl's skin. A Gypsy girl with orange hair who made her living by vandalizing parking meters and duping unwary tourists. A girl so exotic to me now that she might as well have been a native of some South Pacific island. One who made me believe at the age of nineteen that the future was indeed limitless, that no wrong choice could not be undone.

Some days before they left, my daughter asked me what it would take, since I was so obviously miserable, for God to forgive me. She is twelve, theologically precocious, with a penchant for Socratic irony. The lines above the bridge of her nose are clear signs of her resentment toward me. Arguing with her is a debate with the Grand Inquisitor; I was lost without speaking a word. How could I begin to explain to her what it means to be forty-two years old, to read the next thirty years as if they had already been written, to be choked by the twin pains of longing and regret? That such pains, no matter how clichéd, can drive weak souls into the arms of willing accomplices, and souls weaker still into the passive madness of bitter daydream? That to forgive oneself, and thereby embrace the forgiveness of God, would require—for the sake of virtue—a forfeiture of dream and desire?

In the room above our garage, the windows face east, and during the summer there is not a morning that is not clear. The sunrise above the Sierra is magnificent, the sky gradually lightening,

the red glow of morning throwing the dark mountains into stark relief. These days, since my unconscious heroism and surrender of this past June, I am awake to see the daily miracle of rebirth and admonition; it washes me with its tides of honesty and grace, and I am reminded that long before my family left, I had already orphaned myself with yearning and self-indulgent woe.

At these moments of reminder, I become—for a small space in time—them all; I know their lives intimately, projections of my own failure, my own pain: Max and Lennie, Patrice and Sylvia, Doctor Klinefelter and Virginia, my departed family, the cretin on the bathroom floor whom I no longer claim. They are mine, after all, my responsibility, my children, adopted without their knowledge or consent. I pray for them to understand that in a choice between inevitable evils, the noble embrace the greater hurt.

What am I to say to such things? Where, after all, will this catechism lead?

That in this land of light and shadow and make believe, the dream may school the dreamer?

Oh, yes.

And that the character that is my own—poor, passing fact if ever there was one—may find within that dream the breath that will let him live?

Yes.

Yes.

Absolutely.

Yes.