

The Silence

Perchance. Water. Clear pools of water. Ice cold springs of water, flowing on and on and on. I sit where the streams begin, and floods bring no end again. I remember when I was three. Wide, peaceful skies fill the lakes of years. I walked beside Hope, who was then only two. Today is the day she died. What do we sleep that has no face? I remember when the laughter stopped; I remember when the sun turned pale. The dry dusk of season unfolds. Dreams of dissonance reverberate through her tomb. Lust covered candy bars melt, and sodas fizz and go flat with time. The sun. I remember it well, warm, full of light, and the rain it shed. They made us. They made everything I am, and now all that we will ever be, those feeble wicked lights that flutter in the night sky, soaking imagination, drowning it in the wake of a new moon. Questions, spider webs in memory. I sat in chocolate fields of youth under marshmallows filled skies, suspended in mid-air like a sweet memory of an age that will not leave. Time becomes. It dissolves. We are fed a lie of sugar and spice but made to stomach a bitter truth: They will tell you to be yourself, but only if you are what they want you to be. This breath I take, the sound it makes when it breaks the cold silence... "What's that?" Hope was curious.

"I don't know?" Discord wondered.

"It's a legless lizard hiding under a log of deadwood."

Of course, it was nothing but imagination. And what is imagination but a ploy, a trap in the heart of the intellect. It was mid-morning. The sun had begun to dry up the dew. The birds...those feathered seraphs that chirped out of sight, up beyond the broad leaves of white oaks, and the new, fluorescent green needles of loblolly pines. And there were red oaks, pin oaks, black-jack oaks, and bull pines, catalpa trees and catalpa worms, willows, and vines. Time was not wasted when a child. And what was a child? A beast, a miniature creature which resembled a human, but was not? Things which made no sense as a child, still do not settle with logic today. Trials of youth are like any other; perhaps they are with more hope. Shall I pour the salt some more? Youth is nothing more than a gaping wound of memory bleeding from a farce, altered and exaggerated, fretted, and exasperated. "What 'cha doing?" Discord scratched in the dirt with a stick.

"I'm a princess." Hope smiled.

"No, you're not, you're a witch." Justice interjected.

Hope was lost. She had little, only little things, but she sat quietly in the wake. And Justice and Discord...what does a book do but enslave a young mind, a taste of freedom for a mouthful of venom. The snakes began to sliver all about the grass; under a stone, you will find them there. War, what unforeseen terror does it hold to mankind? Soft-spoken words, kisses in the sky, and watery dreams.

The mist behind the rite, the fog of ritual, -how the rain of passage clouds the mind. Fear lurks in the shadow of those it entrusts. Go to sleep sweet butterfly, -the lilies, they lie. In the spring, we plant a garden. To watch it grow. No doubt it will wither in autumn, and whether the fruit survives, it will only be food, gobbled up by the hand of something. Plant gods perhaps. And the child, it too would wither away and fall on an ambrosial platter, or an early storm might take its passion, grace it with locust honey and... Swallow. And pretend it never felt a thing. They drank water from a babbling brook, thinking it might transform them into imaginary things.

“Look at those clouds!” Discord pointed above.

“I see a castle!” Hope described a dream sitting on the edge of the universe. “I see a face.” Discord reflected in his imagination.

“Where?” She was curious.

“Look, see...there’s her eyes...and down from those are her lips and,” Discord cascaded, detailing the intimacy of his personification in the heavens.

Secluded within a tall stand of southern pines, around the pine needle covered bank of a sanctuary, prickly pear cacti bask their leathery skin in the warmth of sun that shone through the towering trees as flies were swatted away from the young skin of a young hunter and a fisherman, gathering dreams of the earth that he lay upon. The swallows dove from the sky around the pond, swooping through cattails and nesting in a haven of echoes. The time had changed. Times have changed. Or is it time is change? Solitude gathered in the mid-day breeze.

After the future comes the past. Discord sacrificed half his lunch to Hope. Justice was busy torturing animals, sharing not in his delight, unable to distinguish his pain from that of his prey. A spider wove its web, and the flies lay trapped in hope of sudden departure. Discord would catch June bugs, blinded by the light. Out of the house they would be set free. Freedom...where was this place. Outside, a land so close to the latter. In a vanishing instance, it was spread out before them. Moisture gathered on the top of this last dark plateau, glistening in the light of star drops that sprinkled like water in the night. Until the day gave birth to the fruit of life. A planter and a fisherman, a hunter of the other land. A farmer lost his herd. For perhaps an hour, a panther -liquid black its skin- crouched and nestled in the outskirts of the fog of reason, perpetrating a damp and darkened stone. When in the moment of the misty memory... Its heart leapt forth from the stillness of a meadow and sank claws into the back of its passive prey. A cat of preternatural physique. Claws sought flesh. Blood stained to leak from a silent ring of claws. A wild ox blows and slings the panther to the ground. Thoughts jolt. I gasp as my breath be-quiets the sound. Then, sugar spilled from the sky. We were in lemonade. Ice cubes floated by above, as lemon leaves fluxed in the swirling, sour wind of spring. I could taste the cold winter on my tongue as it warmed into spring, flowing down the dark passage, through a grotto in a dream, the hunger in this stomach is pain, back out again, golden streams flowing down upon the sugary produce of life, this fertile fruit of an apparition shadowing on the earth.

“Sit.” Ms. Black said.

We followed commands like dogs, most of us. Others were pennies that had landed on tails. “Sit down now, Jester!” Her voice was more controlling now, but the boy knew it was just that. He ignored her persistence.

“In the hall!” She yelled and opened a drawer of her desk and removed a wooden board. It was no surprise that our English teacher could not form complete sentences in her ignorance of anger.

I heard her yelling as she whipped the boy.

“You’ll learn to mind me you little smarty pants, now bend over and touch your toes.” She was a monster.

“Whack! Whack! Whack...” It went on as the classroom sat in a fog of fear and silence. It was over.

Another one beaten down.

We called her Ms. Yes Mam. That bitch couldn't open her twat without saying that abominable phrase.

"Break your jaw to say, yes mam." She would bleed in a blasphemous, fragmented sentence. How many times have I wanted to correct her sentences (and slit her throat) as she did the others in our class. Had I not known then what I know now? No. But there was that other pile of worthless bullshit I despised, that lie I heard in contempt each time I asked the question, "Why?"

"You'll understand someday, when you're older."

But someday never came; and still, I sit beneath a blue, marble sky. And I am older now, but there is nothing that will ever help me understand. They said they were doing it for our own good. "Fuck them."

The drug took control. It is what we are addicted, control. And to have it perform this task for me was to negate my responsibility as a human. Something to disconnect my memory, to sever the flower from its stem.

Fear and Terror. Like those twin satellites of Mars, clouds of darkness hovered around the hearts of children, nothing more. I stood at the double doors awaiting our sentence. Clouds hovered over a pool of water that was busy imitating a fish. And the cumulonimbus ecstasy of the suspense of the storm stirred in the calmness of trepidation before a gale of wind brought a wisp of the horrid squall. We were led to the principal's office. There our judgment awaited us hidden away from the eyes of our peers. A "good" beating would suffice. I sat in a chair, trembling, shaking in the fear they prescribed. Sweat flowed profusely from my palms, -my heart; it beat in waves of confusion. They had left us alone in the office, and I desperately pleaded with the others to escape. Truancy was freedom weighed against this punishment that awaited, this torture by the adult masters. My head spun. I twitched as tension mounted. I would have no part in this whipping today. I fled the mass insanity of the institution I had been sent daily. I remember running through the fields behind the school. I had found freedom, this land the liars spoke of, and it was buried in a silent tomb, here, beneath the meadows, under the stone of everyday existence.

I saw Ms. Yes, Mam coming down the road I had fled in a dream. Would I be punished in my state of shock? The storm blew past, the echoes of thunder called out, but the rain did not fall... a taste of my quietus habitat. And I had sewn the fallow ground. Erosion stripped mined a hollow inside. I stood petrified in an empty space. Where would I run that should seed the sodden soil and plow my escape? I remember nothing but that I was alone and vulnerable in the most horrid way, betrayed by my mother and in dread of my father who had sent me here to this institution. Fear is the only darkness; and it was these clouds that I could not see, blinding me, intolerably.

Each day it echoed down the halls, this rhythm I sought to avoid. Could I keep up the pace? What would happen if I got out of step? I would most surely be pulled to the side of this mad march and flogged, as were the others. The whippings did not seem to occur until the afternoon; and some days, the storm was calm. But everyone knew it was here, even when you thought you had done nothing at all they were watching for you to make a mistake. "Be seated!" Said a voice.

"You, you, and you, out in the hall." The voice said as it pointed out the students who would be victimized in the hallway.

"It is odd that we can't remember where or when we were born. Isn't it?" Discord was an efflorescent figure blooming under a star-lit sky, encircled within this theater whose

backdrop was a black canvas, an enigma that sprinkled wishes down upon the lonely leaves of dew-soaked grass.

"I know." Hope fluttered her wings.

"What's the first thing you can remember?" Discord asked.

"I can't remember." Hope was busy watching the lightning bugs in the field up on one those, those distant ones of worlds to come, beyond them.

"What do you mean, you can't remember? How could you forget the first thing you remembered? That doesn't make any sense." He contemplated utopia as he resided in an endless horizon of destiny.

"I don't know, I guess I mean that I can remember, you know? But I just don't want to...because...I don't know." Hope landed on a flower.

"Because most of them are echoes?" Discord was a cloud, dark and threatening. "Echoes?" Hope flew across the meadows.

"Yeah, those things you don't like to think about, bad things." He imagined himself flying through space with storms of rock and fire, demon eyes along the trail.

"I remember when we were small. I remember the first time we played together. I was a princess, and you were a frog, and..." Hope lay trapped in a sticky, funneling web of memory.

"...And then Justice came and made you eat dirt." The spider sank in its fangs, venom made frail the fragile wing of the butterfly.

"What's the first thing you can remember?" Hope brought the rain.

"I remember the train below our house, the one down the dirt road we lived beside. Every night the deep vibrating sound on my window foretold the coming of the Beast and would always put me to sleep." Discord wafted through the ether of the cosmos.

"It didn't keep you awake." Hope tasted the sweet water they swam. "What?" Discord sailed outside the solar system.

"The train." She reminded the boy.

"No." Discord flew away on the quaint clouds of dissonance that spiraled into the heavens.

"Oh." Hope played a psychoanalytic detective, testing the fingerprints of Discord's mind for fallacy in his punctual reply.

"Well, I see." Hope was a fisherman in the depths of thought, catching minnows as they swam past. Most of the mystery relied on non-verbal communication, expressions that gave clues to inner conflict and indifference. All were betrayal of the mind: a twitch of the head, a blink of the twitching eye, a rapping of the fingers on a desk. Seeing is understanding, and Hope saw a lot of little things.

But she still understood very little. -A little girl who understood a little about every little thing. We pay for freedom with suffering, but we achieve this foreboding task with unyielding defiance and calculated insolence to unleash the beast on those who had encaged it. And we swam in it every day, this hypocrisy of silence of the aphoristic pair, those dogs that snarled control to hear the echo of their own bark. Tonight, we lie, and tomorrow we die. It is that we dream when we are awake, but we sleep when we should be dreaming. We thank some not for the love they unveil but hate them for the distrust they've caused.

"Fuck them." I thought again... that lucid colors coveted each reverberation of an ear-piercing silence that followed me from day into the night.

We were at the beach, somewhere on time. Hope found a crustacean living in the skeleton of some ocean creature. The little coffin critter seemed quite content in its makeshift home of a

seashell. We saw dolphins that lived in a cave beneath us, a majestic aquatic palace this cave. Alas but a pale land, the sea!

"Follow me." We swam in ecstasy and found our way back. We floated thither on the farther shore. Hope had found another hermit crab living in a pink shell. They dwelled in a house so tranquil by the sea; a boy and a girl flirted on the water's edge, building castles in the sands of time.

"What are those?" Curiosity spoke.

"I think they're turtle eggs...or what's left of them." I became a hunter.

"Why do you think people say something is left? Is left a bad thing? Things are left over, or left behind, or incomplete like when something is left to do. But when it comes to the other side, things are the right thing to do, or the right-of-way, or the right answer opposed to the wrong answer, which is obviously the left answer." I rambled as the waves of a clear, blue-green sea washed the sand subtly on the shore.

"Maybe it's because most people are right-handed. A long, long time ago, people who were left handed were considered bad by everyone else because they were different, and so it kinda gave the left side a bad name or something, I guess?" Hope passively waded through the swelling of an ocean wave.

"People used to think there were monsters in the sea, you know?" I recalled a dream-picture magnified in the reflection of the water, represented by the distant allusion to a memory.

"They thought a lot of things, but that doesn't make them true." Hope stepped back onto the warm sand and walked as it stuck to her wet skin.

"How do you know there aren't giant sea creatures, have you seen them?" I tried to spook an imaginative mind.

"No, I haven't seen them, -or yes I have seen giant sea creatures, but they weren't monsters, at least not like what you were making them out to be." Hope bathed in the sun.

"But that's just it..." They walked over the ripples in the sand, "...no one has ever seen any monsters, or at least not me, they're only in stories, kind of like ghosts and gods." She said.

"So how do we know they're not out there?" I persisted as thunderclouds gathered in the distance of a mid-afternoon sky.

"But?" Hope was beached. "I guess that's the same thing I'm trying to say...that we don't really know if they are real or not." Her stream of thought had reached its end. It had been swept into a river where it would only become a swirling pool among many lakes in a sea of an ocean of ideas on this earth. We returned to the task of the castle we had begun a short while ago. The wind became cool, and the palms began to move. A boy and a girl dug portals to another world in the sand. Seashells impersonated vessels that transported imaginary travelers to the other side of nowhere. The clouds at first are such comfort, such haven from the battering sun that browns youth as it turned youth into a leathery hide of a cactus with its age. We submitted unwillingly to the shadow of our doom. Even when the first drops of the storm that fell upon our seascape fortress seemed comforting, the pleasure of the pain was overwhelming.

Footsteps hushed on wet sands.

"Get off my beach." Justice came and kicked down the edifices of imaginary kingdoms, swinging his stick, shouting, and snickering and proud of his destruction.

"Nobody invited you." Hope threw sand at her friendly enemy, but Justice kept about his destructive intercourse and gave little attention to the little things Hope had to say. We drove all night. The highway hallucinated as the sun returned; it shifted; it shuttered in our eyes.

Mirages formed on the road, transfixing a dry and flattened toad, crystallized by the mid-summer heat. Trapped we were like an strange insect in a flux of reason, eternized in a hardening sap of dysfunction only to be dissected with callous logic after the turbulence subsided, and the eye of the flaming breath cooled. How familiar was the medicine man with his voodoo pins? Therapist offered their verbal enemas, but it was a cathartic I needed not, and its laxative drained us to puncture the ballooning clouds of Deja vu into masses of gushing waterfalls. Prefabricated idleness had come to its incandescent end, bottomed out in these mirror pools of memory that now bubbled to the surface again.

Our parents had sent us away, and now our charter had mapped about a circle in this parallel dimension of distrust. Our aunt we confided could not be lent a sleeping eye; she was to be feared within all limits of her power over us. She went through ritualistic torture reminiscent of the wooden paddle terror of those so-called “teachers,” the monsters that prowled the hallways of our school years. It was that we should be sent, when at night in limbo between route, at motels, hotels, and rest stops, to be interrogated for various things, tied down and subdued by our own fears and unknowing by a hand emulating a vivid structure that manufactured our “upbringing” with psychotic indifference.

Again, everything pulsed with the shock, but this time instead of a black screen, it became a television station that had lost its signal during a storm, gray fuzz dominated the moment of the impious lie. We were led one by one into the back room and asked about the “problem.” Someone had spilled a soda on the clean, white sheets. And when the violator was apprehended, he or she must be punished, tortured with a small boat paddle that was kept in the trunk of the car as a method of restraint, sodomized by the laws of ignorance. I fell from a cliff of surreal heights onto the surface of the fantasy. When now I met with its watery surface, my mind blurred, the signal was lost, -a power outage followed. The surge subsided, and I regained conscious memory as I stood before the running water of a bathroom sink, a tranquil piped spring that soothed me into remission of the trauma. A chance to not wet the bed in a muscle-binding delusion on through the night, I washed away the tears and slept with the aid of a vague light. The next day we returned to the point from which we remained, these days of the fragile abode.

Summer vacation had come to an end, again. Severed eyes awaited an anxious hour. I lay wrapping myself in a spider’s web, unawake, unable to sleep. I watched an alarm clock pass in the temporal presence of relativity. Sequential horror ensued, and I hoped for a good death. I imagined myself as the hero. And in these unfulfilled desires oozing out an ingenious pore in a dream, I saw unstable ground shift, floods of fire and waves of blood. I was held intrigued by the immaculate stars above. This heaven, -a gate to the unknown. I stared into the flickering flames, and the glowing, sparking coals of a campfire, awaiting the tale of Jack Straps told by Uncle Goat.

Behold the tragedy of man, faltering through the unstable abyss of sands. I know not what? I know not why. We stand in but a pool of dampness and sullen caricature, this false impression, this misrepresentation of distorted reality. At night, images, traces of light, shadows of silence echoed through a room with no walls, picturesque temptations of mortality that clasped out and haunted me through the swift current of a bubbling, frothing dream I slept. I paused midstream, and for a second. I was there, drifting through eternity,

free at last! Liberty was here in a dream, independence from the whippings and the controlling. The passion was lost as the current slowed to a lax and lethargic pace. And I thought back to the pond and what Hope had meant to me then and now. And where was Justice now? Every day I woke to the mirror of time, but today it was not there. Had this dream transformed me? Had the demons forsaken me and forgot that I existed? Now the question uttered itself into my brain, -drip, drip, drip goes the bloody stain. I took up a pen, once again, and the diabolical travesty of the ink foretold the accounts. The written word, an omen so dark and beautiful I thought I'd died, but I did not die. I did try and remember the reasons why. But I could not, and now they all must pay. For has the tragedy a golden rule, out of all the characters in the Good Book, everybody dies. And now my story attuned with the tides, and the darkness of the moon pulled strongly upon my will, or was it the laughter that conjured up the beast: Was it the laughter that made us kill?

Ephemeral happiness sat on a watermark. I raised an umbrella to the coming of the rain. I walked in a field of mushrooms; I ate consciousness by the handful. It had been ten years since I sat around the fire, but I hallucinated a better time. Uncle Goat had left this World, riding away on that demon train that came unexpectedly in the night; a dream of falling from darkness into light. "You're not going to want to hear this, and I'm not sure of how to tell you." I heard a voice mumble, but I knew already.

"What happened, who died?" I thought that the clues lay in Justice's expression; the evidence lay behind the fingerprints of the mind. What offense does death hold, what crime is the inevitable? "It was an accident." I saw Justice's lips moving, but I fell now upon two parallel universes; I stood here, my body there.

Raindrops fell on the windshield of the vehicle I drove. I watched them gather as I drove. One, then another -three, and several, then many fell in tranquility. Our lives pretend; they are make-believe. Some say you can alter the future by what you do with today, but that you cannot change the past.

But you can, -you can change the past. These were not foretold prophecies. When was the birth of God? Martyrs mock the tales, the pale masks they wear give away a clue. History, the subtle lie. With their books and words, they paint the world. But it isn't what it used to be, life. Out of fluid waters we drank, but out of these flowing wet returns the stagnant pool of mud, and then from the dust of death we inhale. Yet these reasons justify their tale, of truth, they fail. Life, then, is whitewashed, the past faded gray.

The more your internal world closes in, collapses in on you, the more organized your external world becomes. The dishes are clean. The shelves are organized. Papers neatly stacked, paper clipped, systematically filed away. What beauty death beholds to the troubled mind, the dim relief it forces upon this fog smothering your days and dreams, waking to the mirror of reality every morning. Fingers anxiously tap out a familiar tune. Words stick like metaphors to the roof of your mind, syllables don't sound right, everything sounds off key. Problems of communication soon arose. And I began to paint a rose. I painted and sketched my toes... wiggling. I drew a field of flowers, and upon each stem, I saw a face. They were all looking at me, each face I saw facing me, smiling and laughing at me.

"Hello? Who is there?" I had a vision of a figure that entered the room.

Mental illness is but a perpetual state of emotional flux. I swam in a pool of swirling water but could not touch the bottom, nor could I reach the shore, though always was I closer to the bank, yet constantly pulled away was I by an undertow, pulled into a lake of despair.

When in the clear of a neurotic wave, I dove under to see the oblique sandy bed; and still, I swam toward an illusion on the bed of a bottomless sea, this depth unknown. It can always get darker. For when I return to the still surface again, the water. It seemed so clear.

So it was that my story began months before, when under the influence of the Infallible Church. I sat in silence as a train roared past.

“Hello Discord. What brings you to the Infallible Church?” The preacher said in rapturous condescension and patronization.

“I have come to speak with God.” I replied.

“Is that so young Discord? But God does not talk to just anyone.” The preacher claimed.

“But He speaks to you, does He not?” I asked.

“That He does, in a way...” He went on. “You see, the prophets of long ago were the ones God spoke, and they left us the Good Book, and today I am the one who interprets it to the people.” “I see.” I understood, the preacher did not.

“So, you’re an interpreter for God? I asked.

“In a way.” The preacher said.

“Will I ever be able to interpret the Good Book?” I asked.

“Not unless you become a preacher like me young Discord.” The preacher thwarted his status.

I assumed the priest was a violent man and decided not to trust his word. And I really have no idea what brought me to the Infallible Church to start with. But there I sat, before the hypocrisy of the congregation, head bowed admitting that they were miserable iniquitous sinners. I too bowed my head low, closed my eyes, and in the absence of God, sought what could not be found. These people had little clue who or what God was, and neither did I. But this I knew: God was not to be found within the four unholy walls of the Infallible Church. I sat and listened to a geocentric preacher speak of how God would have his children chastised, how God would have the gentile children of this world whipped, how God would have them tortured by physical punishment and to make them upright again. I sat and brooded at his words. But unable was I to offer evidence of the atrocity that he fulfilled. Perhaps I was the messiah crucified. Perhaps I was the one who must die. The people of the Infallible Church, the covenant of literal interpreters, the prophets of an almighty babble, could not help my pathetic, rotten worldly core. Each time I attended the unholy structure, I became less at ease. A strange morose pessimism mystified my thoughts, and for the death of mankind I could not fathom why. But then it occurred to me one drunken and stoned evening, I felt beckoned to the mirth of their double standard. Why each week did they not try to become less miserable sinners? Instead, they used the Infallible Church as an excuse to go out and engage in promiscuous acts of insincere kindness. The people of the Infallible Church regularly attended this heap of bricks and boards they call a house of worship, while under the pretense that it was Holy, and it was Holy because they performed holy rituals there, and if they dwelled within this hallowed edifice, sanctified by the drooling of their “good” and godly deeds, somehow, this made them closer to God. I knew nothing. But I knew that they knew nothing. And that is not to say that I knew more, and indeed, then I thought I must, for I saw the blemish in their defense, this shield they put up, this twisted pattern of ignorant thinking; but I thought around their unholy whims, and in the heart of their devilish stare, I saw them falter, stumble, trip on a stepping stone that

led to the crest of the tower of wisdom. And upon this wise zenith, this apex of newfound knowledge, the Unknown and there I sat. And before me hung a mirror. I stared for hours into the glimmering reflection dangling, hanging from the silvery mesh of a spider web, a blasphemous web of regret. I knew then why they needed perfection in their lives, what they claimed to receive from this flawless Good Book. But I dug a shallow well, and the water lay just under the surface, slowing my shovel the further I quarried in the mud. And I excavated an ancient, hallowed ruin with what they called "my impious thinking," this logic I was programmed. Things change, don't they? What do we make of these prisons that hold our minds enslaved. They will deny the Good Book is just a story, a spectacular story so it seems. But they lay claim to a book they do not own, and claim to be interpreters of a divine source, which needs no interpretation. If it is so divine, why need it the fumbling fingers of ignorant men to summarize, in limited words, an absolute truth? Why this distance? Why this book on being and morals? I had refrained from going to the Infallible Church, forevermore. I was walking home one evening when I came across Ms. Brown. She looked at me startled, said hello, and then walked on down the road. The encounter with the so-called teacher triggered a flashback, and I remembered a fight with a bully at school named Jester. I was younger then. But I remember when. So, where has it been. Revenge, it spun a bloody trap. Blood red fragments shattered in its molten core. Seraphs watched us play, and maybe, someday... We all thought Justice was unfair, but I defended him against those whom he was just alike.

Echoes stirred in the silence of a repressed past; horror flashed backward within.

"Fuck you, Jester. Give Justice back the ball." I said frustrated.

"Come get it pussy boy, fuck'n faggot sissy bitch boy." Jester tantalized me.

"I said give me the ball back, asshole." I pushed and shoved and grasped after the dark red kickball.

"Fuck off, Discord!" Jester yelled. "It's my ball and I said you can't play with it.

I threw a punch, unfortunately with all my might. The swing missed substantially and fell on empty air. I, too, fell to the ground as Jester helped me along, laughing, with a push. Jester, the larger of us two boys, pinned me with his knees. He then made sexual gestures to imitate sodomizing me, laughing, laughing, laughing... Torture, it dwelled in the sleeping, unspoken mind. Grave, quiescent tone as vibrant lace turned to stone. What had happened to Jester in the past that echoed in him to be this monster? A parasite, a virus infected this child with its ugly mouth. Dirt. The wind stirred up debris and pollinated the virgin flower.

I was escorted to the principal's office. There the principal removed his paddle from his desk, but when he went to get a "witness" for the whipping, he came back with Ms. Brown. To my desire, she told the principle that I did not "deserve" to be paddled. Though, I later lost all respect for Ms.

Brown as well. One day, as I sat in class, she pulled Justice into the hall.

"Hands on your knees... Whack! Don't move! Smack! Thud!" The helpless boy, afraid, tried to raise up. "I said... Bend over!" Whack! Whack! Ms. Brown raped Justice with punishment to his butt in her anger, as Ms. Yes, Mam arrogantly "witnessed" the foul and despicable act.

"Fuck them." I said as I tried to silence the echoes inside.

"Fuck who?" Hope asked as we continued to walk down the road.

"Nothing," I said in distrust, "I was just talking to myself." "What's the matter?" she asked.

"I don't know." I replied.

"If you talk about whatever is bothering you, maybe you might feel better." Hope thought. "That's just the problem, I can't talk about it." I explained the nature of the madness. But that was then, and this is now. Hope is gone, dead. And the winds blow cold upon my face, and clouds of darkness over the earth. For weeks, I have not left the house, but stayed secluded in the sanctuary of my mind, locked behind the door of my mental room, while the memories of Hope's smile pad its walls. And I stared through a fogged window, out into the rain that fell through the cold, dead, winter trees of life. I have become the hunter, the shadow that stalks in the brush. Justice and I took up hunting wild pigs in the Woodlands north of our home. When no one will listen to the silent cry, it is muffled in the blood of animals. The pigs, very simply, were to us those authoritarians of our youth. For each pig killed, the fear and terror of madness was prolonged. The filthy swine was left to rot. This pig that dies was my teacher, this one a policeman who harassed me in the park. But the hunt could not hold back the waves of darkness forever, and some of the water flowed through the sticks and mud of the therapeutic dam of slaughtering the sow. A slice to the tender flesh of her throat sent a fountain of red down the boulders where she was slain, washed away with the fallen rain.

God does not need Man. But Man needs God. Give us faith and we shall believe, give us logic and we shall reason, but give us face and we shall live. Do the readers of the Book read to be lost in fantasy as I when I read a novel? I am hunted by Death. It stalks upon me during my midday naps.

Each time I wake up, sweating, my heart pounding from fear of it all.

I am haunted by shadows. When will I take off this mask? I have returned to the pond I remembered in my youth. But it is not what it used to be. I knew this was the one, geographically, but this image, this picture in my head I sought was not there. Those tall pines of my youth had been cut down and taken to a local timber company. There, they would be sawed up and made into lumber, lumber from which might someday build again the prisons of youth, those diabolical schoolhouses, and boards which would be fashioned into paddles to torture the students who attended the asylum. Apathy, rage, and despair. They silence our footsteps. And they will remain there, among the trees.

Alas, the silver curtain unveils. The bitter fall of autumn rain. Slow, peaceful showers that go on for days. I lay on a boulder, bleeding inside, -dying, death, dead my mind. Silver drapes wash away memories as a trickling creek consumes the stone. Will all that remains of us be lost to the flood, swept away by the streams of thought that form a current in the dim horizon, deafening ears as they drown out life to the sound of the roaring stream, swallowed by this predatory shadow in the abyss? The ritual of life is not complete without a story of the end; people want to know. Give us the reasons why we must die; tell us the story of the fall of man, tell us of the sadness inside; tell us the tale told before, rinse us off once again, drown us in the pain of the heavenly rain in a book so subtle and supple. Have I written it well, justified my cause well? It is a letter farewell. I follow the splenetic melody of insanity, to hear again the melancholy harmony of misery, an overture, a rasping antic cry of loneliness. Well, what then? Well, what now? Perhaps they would prescribe when to dream, what to believe, who to love, who or what to kill? Kill time: kill God! Beloved Hope, I hate to feel the pain of goodbye. Thorns in my head. And I remember now what I've tried to forget. I remember the laughter laughing at me, at you. I remember when it was better then.

The fragile eggshell cracked and out seeped the yolk. The pieces have fallen where they lay, fragments of memory. For, so slowly we find out of those who love; though we have drunk, and drink still more of, all things come to pass like empty drops of sorrow. I pray for the silence. I pray for the end. I flee. I run. I fear the Drum.

Water. Clear pools of water. Ice cold springs of water, flowing on and on and on. I sit where the streams begin, and floods bring no end again. I remember when I was three. Wide, peaceful skies fill the lakes of years. I walked beside Hope, who was then only two. Today is the day she died. What do we sleep that has no face? I remember when the laughter stopped; I remember when the sun turned pale. The dry dusk of season unfolds. Dreams of dissonance reverberate through her tomb. Infatuated candy bars melt, and the sodas of life fizz and go flat with time. The sun. I remember it well, warm, full of light, and the rain it shed. They made us. They made everything I am, and now all that we will ever be, those feeble wicked lights that flutter in the night sky, soaking imagination, drowning it in the wake of a new moon. Questions, spider webs in memory. I sat in chocolate fields of youth under marshmallows filled skies, suspended in mid-air like a sweet memory of an age that will not leave. Time becomes. It dissolves. We are fed a lie of sugar and spice but made to stomach a bitter truth: They will tell you to be yourself, if you are what they want you to be. This breath I take, the sound it makes when it breaks the cold silence...

Whispers

Behind each mirror I see a face watching me slowly as a ghost whispering in the darkness it is there slowly watching and whispering to the others that are there, ghosts themselves, watching me and whispering things saying, "Hello there, you; we know you, but you already know this, don't you?" and I look into my eyes and see for myself these apparitions, these mirrors, these other faces of myself whispering, watching, saying "Hello." until there is nothing left to remind me who I am. There are only mirrors of days and years, events, and seasons. There is nothing left but these memories, these mirrors to remind me of a surreal past. There is nothing left. There is nothing. Can I let myself believe in this illusion? Can I let myself become something I do not believe in? This metaphor for life is called happiness, is this the illusion I face? A visage of the melancholy ecstasy.

"Hello." Whispered the Shadow.

"What is it?" I replied.

"It is almost time, you know?" It followed.

"Time for what?" I asked the Shadow.

"You know. To say 'Goodbye'."

All of reality rests upon one lone, dry straw. If it were to break, this frail dead stem of grass, the world would vanish unnoticed. Today I walked through a field. As I walked there, I saw this very straw, the loneliness, the empty, hollow pith upon which our fragile world resides. A bird flew down from where it was perched in a nearby tree. And it picked up that very straw in its beak and flew off to build its nest, a universe woven of a thousand brittle realities to form one home, one soft, warm abode for several eggs. But there in lay the magnitude, spring hatching delicate bare seraphs that would someday build a universe of their own. But what would become of our reality, parched in a tree... and then the rain, it fell upon a thousand empty dry stems of grass. And it is that they were but straws again, nothing more.

"Is this real?" I thought as I walked.

"What do you think?" Inquired the Shadow.

"I don't know." I wandered off the path.

"Do not be afraid." It offered.

"Leave me alone." I

begged. "But you

are alone." "All

alone." I thought.

A butterfly landed upon a flower. It sat there and suckled for a moment and then it fluttered across the meadow. Still, the flower stood there. It could see other flowers in the distance cluttered together. But this flower stood alone. There were large clusters of flowers, hundreds, thousands...but this flower stood alone. There were couples of flowers, groups of flowers of three, four, and five. But upon one knoll of grass sat a flower... alone. The flower watched from a distance as the other flowers mingled in the wind until one day, autumn

came. Alone, the flower died. I sign my name with this flower. And in a meadow, love dies in sadness.

“You have been watching me?” I asked.

“You know we have.” Replied the Shadow.

“We’ve always been watching you, waiting for this day.” It loomed.

“It is time to say ‘Goodbye?’” I sat in the shade of a tree.

“Yes, tomorrow.” And the Shadow grew darker.

Beside a moss-covered rocky bluff flowed a clear mountain stream. In the darkness, a pool in the stream seemed like a black mirror reflecting the stars. I sat upon this bluff on a clear and cold, crisp night and stared at that reflection. There are countless numbers of island universes, and we are but one. They are perceptions, particles of time, species of thought extinct. Space, the nothing. It is hard enough to fathom how there could be something. But this nothing of space, it cannot be, for it is not. It is an illusion of form that we conceive the universe to be a boulder in time. But it is only a small stone, an island in an unfathomable sea of nothingness where stars are only grains of sand that line an endless shore in the ocean of time. Even we are full of the emptiness... Around us there seem to be others, but there is nothing, a sentient, transient mirage.

“The day has come.” Echoed the Shadow.

“Goodbye.” I said.

A Campfire Story

I was held intrigued by the immaculate stars above: the heavens -a gate to the unknown. I stared into the flickering flames, and the glowing, sparking coals of the campfire, and awaited the legendary tale of “Jack Straps” told by my Uncle Goat.

“Now all y’all hush and be still for a minute,” Uncle Goat says, “You gotta quiet your head ‘fore we can get started.”

“Once upon a time...” He always began “...A boy and an ox met along a path, traveling the same way.”

“Hello.” Said the boy.

“Who said that?” The wild ox looked about.

“It’s me, Jack, the Traveler.” The boy replied from the haven of a bush.

“A traveler you say. Where is it that you travel?” Inquired the ox.

“Everywhere.” Jack said happily “What’s your name, and where’re you from?” The boy shouted in friendship.

“I am Ox, and I am a Gaur.” Ox continued. “I was captured when I was young and taken to work on a farm where your kind took me and other wild oxen and put us under the yoke, and for many years I was followed by the wheel of the cart and by the plow.

One time, a strong bull named Fret, broke free from his yoke and trampled a Master; he kicked his master in the head and killed him. The next day they came and slaughtered him. They butchered him right in front of us all; a warning, a threat of what would happen to us if we should fight back or try to escape. They made whips from the dead bull’s hide and used them to control us. But then one of the other bulls, Sloth, became passive, and would not work in the field. He stood alone and refused to move. They kept him caged. He was unable to graze in the lavish fields, but only upon the sparse thorn bushes. And when others followed Sloth’s example, they too, were slaughtered in front of us.” Ox hooved the earth as hot steam came out his nostrils.

“I tried to make peace with the humans, but they would not listen, and when they did agree on something, they would later take back their word.”

“We are the ones who feed you, dumb oxen; therefore, you must do as we say.” Babbled the human order.

“But we were Gaur, and before the humans had tried to make us tamed, we were able to survive in the wild. Now we could not, -we had become dependent on their hand, upon their land, for survival, -we were trapped. So, I fled years ago to the Woodlands, away from the valleys of my youth.” The bull ended his story. “What city do you come from, Jack?” Ox inquired of the boy.

“I am from Nowhere.” Jack pointed in a vague direction.

“I understand.” Ox understood clearly, with certainty the dark water in which the boy had come.

“That is a slave town, is it not?” Ox knew.

“Yes, it was, but there was a war between the people there and I have fled to become a Traveler.” Jack was confident, brave, and naïve.

“I could use a friend to guide me through the Woodlands; for, I know them not well, fine Ox. I have nothing to offer you but company in return.” Jack was certain the bull would help him. “But I do not want nor need company; leave me alone boy, please.” And Ox walked on, glancing out of the corner of his eye to weigh the boy’s disappointment.

The boy followed Ox for days, watching from a distance, trying to pick up on what the wise bull knew of the forest. When one day the bull ox had gone to a watering hole, a creek that had been dammed by the elaborate architecture of beavers. Ox had his head down drinking from the cool stream, looking about with his great vision, which could see everything. But Ox did not see the face of the shadow move on the water as it leaped from the trees.

“Look out!” Jack shouted.

The bull was startled, and he jerked. It was enough to cause the panther to miss Ox’s neck and land on his shoulder. Ox blew and tossed the panther to the ground. He stomped and faced the black cat. He stomped the earth, and it shook beneath the panther’s feet. The shadow fled back into the darkness from which it had appeared.

“Thank you, Jack,” Ox said as he continued to map the Woodlands for the predatory beast that sought to eat his flesh.

“That was Death, she is a hunter. She has been stalking me since I came to the Woodlands. I would be a great trophy for the proud killer, but not today.” Ox was a rock; he stood magnificently there, muscles rippling in the sunlight.

“I was watching you drink; I saw the shadow on the water and yelled to you from atop that knoll,” Jack explained.

“I am in debt to you, my friend.” Ox humbled himself before the boy.

“No, you’re not; we’re forever indebted to one another,” Jack remembered. “Debt is slavery, and I will have no slave, but I could still use a strong friend like you to join me on my quest.” “And what quest is that?” Ox asked.

“This journey, this quest for Truth. I must find It.” Jack sat upon a large stone.

“So, is this Truth a place, a thing?” Ox saw again the rough waves, the current that swept the boy far from home, but obliged Jack’s quest.

“I don’t know; that is why we must search.” Jack was sure.

“Very well then, let us begin.” Ox enlightened Jack.

For months they roamed together along a trail. Ox warned Jack of the dangers that lay in the shadows and the importance of staying on the Path. They traveled down the Path until the streams became a river. Ox took Jack through the Desert Lands to a vista on the Mountain of Elsewhere; below they could see the fertile Valley Lands where Ox was born.

And Ox told tales he heard in his youth.

A year passed, and then another. The boy and the ox had traveled down the Path a very long way together. One day, under a mild autumn sun, Ox told Jack of the Deep Sleep.

“But we sleep every night, do we not?” asked the boy.

“Yes, we do.” Ox swatted a few flies away. “But this is the final sleep, an eternal dream that one will not wake from again in this place.” He explained.

Ox instructed the boy to take his horns to go to the Deep Sleep, how to cut three straps from his flesh, and how to polish his horns and tan his hide into a magical leather: One horn would give Jack water, the other wine. And one of the three straps would provide meat, the second fire, and the third would always provide the safest direction for him to travel.

And yet another year vanished under the Sun that is now only a wish to some dreaming eye of tomorrow. Jack and the ox had returned to the Woodlands. They would spend the night in a cave. It was late fall, and the air had grown crisp, cold, and clear. The first snow would fall soon. The stars alone lit up the path to the entrance of this rocky abode. Jack was busy gathering firewood while Ox rested in the mouth of the cave.

Jack returned from the forest with a handful of pine knots he had gathered. He approached the mouth of the cave when within the lapse of a single step, chaos stretched time into distorted proportions.

“Look out!” Ox shouted as he tried to gain his feet.

Jack turned and saw a shadow crouched on a limb behind him. It was Death, the black panther Ox had battled years before. The black panther had not lost her prowess and physique; it swept hauntingly down from the trees at Jack. But the cat was caught amid the kill by Ox. The predator landed and squared off with the bull and let out a deafening scream. The hair on Death’s neck shot up as she crouched. Ox hoofed and stomped in ritualistic combat, and hot breath fogged up around his face. But this battle would be for blood. They circled one another for a moment, searching for an opening. Death lunged and brought down her razors and teeth into the back of the ox’s neck. Her fangs just missed Ox’s jugular, but claws tore deep into the shoulder of the ox, and a kick split open his rib cage. Still, Ox threw the hunter to the ground, again, and buried his horns into the panther’s side. The blow punctured Death’s lung, and bleeding badly, the black cat crawled away in defeat. Shortly thereafter, Death died in a clearing near the cave.

“Don’t hate Death. She was a hunter, and we can’t change that.” Ox fell into the Deep Sleep. Jack said farewell to his friend. Later that night, Jack removed the horns from the dead ox. They were soaked with the blood of the black cat that had crossed their path in front of the cave. He cleaned them and polished them as Ox had instructed. They were beautiful horns, smooth and long. Jack then cut three straps of leather from the back of the dead ox. He began the ritual of tanning them into magical leather. Jack worked into the morning and the afternoon. Soon darkness fell upon the cave once again as Jack fell asleep.

The next morning Jack awoke. The body of Ox was gone; it had vanished in the night that he slept. He went to the mouth of the cave where he had laid out the offering of the two horns and the leather to the spirits. They remained as he had left them except that the horns were now hollowed and beside the fire strap was a stick, and upon the guide strap was carved a map.

“With a map, one can see where one is, has been, or might be; a course to follow, then to flee. With a map, one can see.” Jack remembered the Ox speak of Destiny, a mysterious land in the Hills of the Future.

Jack looked over the map and decided his fate. He would travel to the Mountains of Elsewhere where he and Ox once roamed. But this time he would go beyond, to the dim summit of this dark plateau. He began upon the Path he and Ox had before traveled together. Jack was able to travel farther now at a much faster pace without the slow Ox. But at these faster speeds, he did not observe everything along the Path. And his journey became a very dangerous one.

Jack traveled for many days until he reached the Desert Lands. Each evening, he poured water onto the meat strap from the water horn as Ox had told him. After it was saturated, he wrung the leather out over a flat stone; blood flowed from the strap and turned the stone into meat. Jack took the fire strap. He rubbed it with a stick as the ox told him over a pile of leaves and twigs, he had gathered from the remains of desert shrubs; fire blazed from the pile, and he cooked the meat. Jack sat that night gazing upon the map of the future and drinking from the wine horn, gazing into the Heavens above.

Jack left behind his straps. He took only the wine horn and fled in fear to spend the rest of his days in the Cave. Leaving only, when necessary, always with his face bearing a dark, wooden mask that he had found lying in the place of the vanishing Ox. The straps and the water horn began to haunt Jack. They became ghosts that shadowed him within the Cave. The water horn brought a dark cold rain that kept Jack in the solitude of the dank cave. The blood strap came as an apparition of a Master, a slave driver. The fire strap became the whip of this Master that tortured Jack's soul during his dreams. The guide strap became his-story, a history of the boy, of youth and year. "And that is how we git history, and the Book." Uncle Goat said as he ended the campfire story. "And someday, when you're older, you might run into old Jack out here in these woods, still wearing his mask and runnin' from them there ghosts that haunt him." The fire had become a molten pile of coals, glowing in the night. My cousins and brothers had gone to the warm safety of their sleeping bags in the tent, but I stayed by the blue flickering eye of the beast, that dying fire in the night. The wind howled through the trees and stirred up the burning coals. Sparks shot out here and there as it cooled. I sat in silence, watching Uncle Goat look at the stars, watching the heavens stare down upon us. It had been a good night, and my thoughts and dreams wandered off to the tale of Jack Straps as I fell asleep. I could hear the water of a nearby mountain stream carry me away into the dream world of a young hunter, trapper, and fisherman.

Beat the Devil Out of Them

I was intoxicated by fear in my youth, though. I read and I learned from experience. Discipline. What is it? Well, as a child even I knew it wasn't something that was beat into you; or beat out of you, as in *beat the devil out of them*. But on one hand there is justice, on the other hand there is understanding. I felt like as a child that I received the shit and of the stick. And that is the reason now for my stubborn defiance. I was accused of being a "rebel" when I was a teenager, and I thought that this may in fact be the case, but it wasn't so. My fears were abundant, and corporal punishment was the culprit. And what harm could a little spanking or paddling do to a child, anyway? And that is what I am getting at with this line of thought. I say simply this: Corporal punishment or paddling is a trauma of my past; it was pure torture, and I relate it with God and religion, as God is that disciplinarian of my youth. And I relate my old teacher, Rod Stricter, not to God, but to the Devil. Therefore, Mr. Stricter was an authoritarian, and as such I can't relate him to God, and he was not a father figure but a persecutor. Being such, I have found that any memory of him, any trigger that is... Anything related to physical discipline, as it may be called, or perhaps physical abuse? Anything related to these triggers of childhood memories I have tried to suppress with the elixir. And in the past, I tried to suppress my traumatic childhood memories with a variety of drugs and alcohol. "Break your jaw to say, Yes sir?" That's the phrase Mr. Stricter uttered many times. And that is how people treat a child in the South.

I met a lady once, whom I was supposedly getting into a business deal with to open a Christian bookstore. I was speaking to her about something that had to do with growing up and the idea that we can't help how we were raised; that even though we are rational adults, our behaviors are often dictated by how we were raised. And upon telling her that I did something because I was taught that way as an atheist, she said I was an adult now and was free to choose differently. For one thing I wasn't raised to be an atheist: I was raised to believe how I wanted to believe. I was free to choose differently, but this lady was merely saying: Why don't I choose to believe instead of doubt the way I do? I was raised to think for myself and that is what I intend to do here. Papa was on the threshold of the dark and deep of poverty and the emotional pain of loss of control. He saw that he couldn't continue down a particular path and chose another direction. What did he have that I didn't? He had his mental health. And that is a grand thing, to have one's mental capacities. Granny on the other hand, was to lose her mental faculties during her life. And even she succumbed to the equivalent of what I term elixir. She became addicted or chemically dependent on the drug Benzo. I too have been dependent on Benzo.

But the thing is, I believe I was made to need the elixir. I was subjugated by the likes of sadists like Mr. Stricter, and the terrible idea of being a humiliated and degraded human who is dependent on an elixir to socialize and grow began to appeal to me at a young age. I was traumatized as early as the age of 6, though. And I will briefly discuss this and then delve into my childhood to account for some of the madness that plagues me as an adult.

Misanthropic old Mr. Stricter, he should be dragged out in the street and flogged. But violence doesn't serve a purpose here; in fact, it is violence, the physical violence of abuse that we need to escape and eradicate here in Amerika. No child ever learned anything from the hickory stick except fear and they learned that in order to get what they want in life; they could simply use physical force and violence to attain it. In a way, I'm not even here to argue that corporal punishment is either effective or ineffective: I know that it is nothing but harmful in any case, and so why would it be different to any other child than it was to me. There is one factor that makes it certainly detrimental to a person such as me,, and that is that Mr. Rod Stricter was a Man of God, religious or superstitious at least. He taught that science says that the universe was created with the Big Bang and that humans came to exist through evolution while at the same time adding that some people believe that God created the world in six days and rested on a seventh. The latter belief was science to him, and if you didn't like it and didn't reply to his curt and coarse expressions of "You understand?" and "Break your jaw to say: Yes, sir!" If one didn't reply "Yes, sir!" you were made to walk out into the hall, told to wait there while he got a witness, and while you're waiting the door to the classroom was left open, and all the other children waited and watched and then when Mr. Stricter and the witness came back, chuckling often, you were instructed to bend over and touch your toes, and he tapped your bottom a little to "warm it up" as I have said; and then he came swung the paddle back, held it there for a moment and with all the force he could muster he swung the board, which was about an inch and a half thick, six inches wide and about three feet long, -he came down with the force and violence of his imagined God that he was dealing out right justice for our wrongs; and then after the smack and whack of the first lick he waited and again tapped and warm up his paddle in a sexual manner on the child's buttocks; he waited in order to let the pain sink in so that you felt the severe punishment even more severe than if he swatted you quickly and the pain of the first swat numbed the blows of the next two, for you were struck three times with the paddle; as if this pain instilled any learning other than sheer fear into a child.

Mr. Rod Stricter, on the other hand, was out to execute pious justice and physical and mental abuse upon an innocent and mentally ill child as in my case. And so many other teachers exerted their will onto a child. But did this discipline instill doubt? Yes, it did, indeed! It presented a logical fallacy to my teenage mind: Children were to be cherished, while at the same time abused. An educator could physically hit a child! Corporal punishment violates one's body sexually, therefore Mr. Rod Stricter could be mistaken for a pederast in my book.

Before class began in Mrs. Victory's English class, I was pushing and shoving, playing with a classmate Peculiar. The bell rang and Mrs. Victory came in and saw us and ordered us out in the hall. She went and got Ms. Cotton to witness the beating. She instructed Peculiar to touch his toes and quickly gave him two hard swats with the paddle. Then she told him to go back into the room, and then she told me to touch my toes, and I did. The paddle came down hard against my buttocks two times and I don't think I've ever felt more humiliated and degraded by another human being. I was told to go back into the classroom, and she stayed out in the hall and spoke with Mrs. Cotton. I told myself that I would never be paddled again. And I never was.

I know now that I wasn't a coward. I was just a scared boy, but I'm grown now. And this is my reckoning. I am here to tell you that Mr. Rod Stricter was a coward. And that he didn't beat the devil out of any school children. No. He instilled the devils into them: He instilled fear in them. Though, now I think I believe there is no God out of reason and logic, not out of rebellion. But my life was scornful. God is just your conscience, according to my Mom. And I think she is right. The idea of God is either so grand that it is infeasible and the idea of God is so simple as to be useless. God is what is good and right. And that leaves everything else and Mr. Rod Stricter and his bureaucratic militant educators to the Devil. There must have been something that old Mr. Rod Stricter had seen in science that he couldn't reconcile with his religion.

I went to school one day and I was in Geography class with Mr. Fudge. We were going over chapter 4 and the secretary called him over the intercom to come to the principal's office. He told us to keep reading over chapter 4 and we would discuss it when he got back. Fix sat behind me in the class and he and I talked a little, all the kids in the class spoke amongst themselves by the time Mr. Fudge returned. Mr. Fudge wouldn't tolerate the disorder and said that there would be a pop quiz over chapter 4 since no one had read it. I didn't understand and asked why we were going to have a pop quiz over something no one had read? Mr. Fudge was angered and told me to step out into the hall. I said no and refused. He reached down and opened his desk drawer and put his hand on his paddle. As if putting his hand on the Bible. He told me to step into the hall. I merely laughed, and he turned red and walked out of the room. He didn't come back. The bell rang and class dismissed itself. The next morning, I was called to the principal's office and was dismissed permanently from school. I felt relieved. It seemed the madness was over. But the fear was instilled within me. And nothing would talk it out of me now.