

prologue: the hook. that clever tool

cast or bent or carved to form. barbed like wire, harpoon, an injun's arrows, porcupine quills, platypi, a witty riposte from the likes of Churchill. barbed to keep a firm hold on what's caught.

the hook's as much to present the bait as hold the prey.

the naked hook is not a convincing lure. decoration is camouflage: silver spoon, floating jig, wriggling worm, small colored feathers wrapped delicately with thread, a living invertebrate (cricket or crawdad), minnow from a bucket, something from the kitchen, nightcrawler dug from the backyard or bought in styrofoam from a gas station refrigerator.

this particular hook is a fly. it is not a large hook. but strong, sharp, made to be set in the mouth of a fighting fish. a barb to stay in parted lips. trapped, caught, swallowed.

a man in waders waves his graphite wand to cast a neon spell.
he follows through the motion and repetition.

a man in waders stands in a stream. it is the light of very early. stars are visible. the sky is clear. there is a fog above the cold water. in his right hand is a flyrod, longer than he is tall, it could call lightning from a clear sky. his left hand manipulates the line between the reel and the first eyelet of the pole.

he is casting. creating the notion that spurs the line and moves the fly from spot to spot on the water. like an insect appears, disappears, reappears. from below the surface it seems like magic. there it is. it's gone. there it is again. it's gone. there it is. that catches a fish's attention.

the fly is left in the water and reeled in to take up slack in the line and begin that cast again.

while casting, the left hand pulls line from the reel (it clicks along) and feeds it out.

the line turns and curls in and out and twists back on itself as the reflection of the rod's motion, with each wave the cast grows longer. the neon pattern of the line leads to the fish at its end.

the man wears a beat-up wide brim hat, fishing vest, green hipwaders and a hawaiian shirt. if you could see them you'd comment on the sturdiness of his

hiking boots. he is a travel writer. this is a pleasure excursion. he is out to catch his next meal. sing for his supper. his friend and comrade in hooking is floating somewhere just out of sight in their canoe laden with what you need when you're fishing: camping gear, minnow bucket, tackle to beat all, two ice chests of Schlitz, a small cooler of foodstuffs, bait.

the travel writer is awakened from his trance of motion by a surprising strike. the fish runs with the line and pulls the drag of the reel into a clicking frenzy.

the travel writer stops the reel turning with his left hand. the pole immediately bends with the tautness of the line. a flyrod bends easily. the strength and plasticity of the graphite shaft prevent breakage.

he fights the fish. reels the line in as he wades the direction of the fish. this water-dweller has taken the bait. got the fly set in his lip. the travel writer is quietly determined like a hero with spurs. he will succeed by hook or crook.

lacking a net, he moves toward a gravel bar that emerges briefly from the water. there he stands dry to land the fish.

-c'mon you bastard. get over here

the fish makes a humid ruckus jumping out of the shallow water as the travel writer draws him nearer by way of reel and line.

the butt of the rod planted in the gravel, his right hand on the skinny tip of the pole. the left hand draws the fish out of the water. the travel writer admires his catch as he moves it to dangle over dry. he lets go of the rod and sticks his right thumb in the fish's suffocation. he crouches on the bar and sets about freeing the hook.

the successful fly was tied by a friend's father and guaranteed to lure.

-damn. a nice big one

with a delicate hand the travel writer removes the hook with the least damage to the fish. then places the giant safety pin of a stringer through the fish's tired jaw.

he dips the fish in the water and walks toward a bank to anchor the stringer and start again.

voice: yes. that's a nice one. but he never was very friendly

through fog and dim there's no telling where the words originated.

travel writer: Michael?

the travel writer looks and sees no canoe.

voice: no

travel writer: umm

a fish jumps with a splash and resurfaces.

voice: do you know Michael?

the travel writer looks toward the jumping fish's commotion and speaks to the fog.

travel writer: do you?

to his surprise the fish responds.

fish: yes

travel writer: good grief

fish: he's much more friendly than that fish you caught

travel writer: he probably doesn't taste as good

fish: have you seen him?

travel writer: who?

fish: Michael

travel writer: he's somewhere around here in a canoe

fish: remedy. gunfish remedy. (the fish proffers a scrap of kelp or watercress from his inside vest pocket with an agile fin) that's the number there but I share a party line with a school. and the other number's an eel i used to know. so don't call her. she thinks i'm dead.

travel writer: is there a payphone around here?

the card in the travel writer's hand dries quickly and crumbles in a green dust.

fish: how's the fishing?

travel writer: just got out here but this big sonofabitch'll make a fine breakfast

fish: hints?

travel writer: hence?

fish: do you want any hints? directions? whispered secret pools, foreknowledge of each fish's feeding fetish? not that fish normally think about such things. or really think at all. but i think i could give you a leg up on em. so long as you don't want to ride sidesaddle. it doesn't really seem like you'll need any help. i mean if you'll follow the stream you'll get there. it's a circle. but help is like a tool. like a fillet knife or tin foil or that... hell... what's it called?

travel writer: dynamite?

fish: well. that's a tool. if you want to make a molehill out of a mountain or a stream that works its way uphill. like salmon. which aren't especially plentiful hereabouts. (pause)

or a bridge. that's a tool

that's a lot like a hint. Alfred Nobel felt guilty.

travel writer: i'd like to think we'll be able to feed ourselves and i doubt we'll need a sledgehammer but, just in case, or for the simple fact that you offered, what's a hint that'll keep us fed?

fish: a wet hook is contagious

tired of standing in the middle of a stream holding a gasping fish on a stringer, the travel writer walks the rest of the short distance to the bank to anchor the stringer with a sturdy green stick. he cuts a branch from a sapling and sharpens the end he drives into the ground. his quarry is relieved to be back in the water. air breathing is an alien concept to an animal incapable of conceiving of a length of time longer than the time it takes to suffocate.

travel writer: if that's help what's harm?

fish: here, if you're fishing it's catching

travel writer: i think you've stopped making sense

fish: sometimes. but i suggest the deep spots near upset pillars where the water's dark. the biggest fish live in the cold

travel writer: which way?

fish: either one. it's a circle. let the current tow your canoe

travel writer: sounds good. thanks a lot

fish: have you ever been to the yukon?

travel writer: couple times. to fish

fish: that's where i met Michael, but...

travel writer: i met him on a boat

fish: always fishing. but in the yukon there's a river. a stream really, tributary to a spring thaw monster. that stream winds itself into a shape greatly resembling a treble clef

travel writer: i don't think i've been there

fish: it's pretty remote. but you should visit sometime. it can be hard to remember to fish. so i'm told. but when you do, the fish put up the fight of a lifetime for a freshwater angler. and they don't talk much

travel writer: that's a relief. (pause) don't you feel like a traitor?

fish: nah. fuck em

the travel writer chuckles and checks the order of his rig. he counts the eyelets and turns back to the fish.

fish: have you been over there?

the fish indicates the far bank.

travel writer: i've been thinking about it. i guess it's like an island
fish: there are a few nice places to put a boat in and find a good spot to
camp
travel writer: i guess you've got to cook what you catch eventually but there's still
plenty of catching to do
fish: there's a party later
travel writer: i'll keep my eyes open
fish: i'm off to get wet
travel writer: i'll let Michael know you're around when i find him
fish: have a safe crossing
travel writer: see you later

the fish jumps, splashes and disappears.

the travel writer starts in again fishing. in the opposite direction.

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driving a buick in circles around a statue. the buick is dark blue. the statue is predictably marble. though the driver would prefer bronze or obsidian and something more abstract. the statue is warm and representational. this is a church picnic, carnival, fair and this buick circling the statue is one of the attractions. one of the things you look at at the fair.

the buick and statue and circle in the dirt are bordered on one side by the dunking booth. the dunking booth is always a popular attraction. a high school principal or a deacon of the church wearing a yellow sweatervest. a man loved in such a way as to readily facilitate a long line of admirers willing to send him into a tank of cold water. the front of the tank is plexiglass so the participants can enjoy the dunked man's underwater plight. extra satisfaction.

on the other side, a table under a small pavilionlike tent facilitates a school of goldfish in very small bowls. this game involves pingpong balls. but it is only attractive to children whose parents are not present. parents are not fond of their children bringing goldfish home from the fair.

but the statue is a beautiful woman. thankfully sufficiently clad. there is a dark blue buick and a circle in the dirt made by the endless orbit. there must be extra gasoline hidden somewhere.

even though the beautiful woman called a statue is not suggestively clad she keeps the driver of the buick's attention. he keeps driving in the same tiretracks thinking occasionally of discontinuing the circle. altering his course. but how can he with this statue? it's not a like a rotary, a traffic circle. he's not in new england. so he keeps circling. following himself. hot on his trail.

the bystanders, observers are puzzled by their inability to participate. why else would they be there? what else would they do? there's no one there taking tickets. it looks like there might be some prizes on the far side of the circle but it's hard to tell for the dust.

the statue holds their attention. even as the buick completes additional cycles. *who is she?* the crowd wonders. there is a small brass plaque at her feet but no one dares cross the path of the buick. even if that is the point of the exhibit and the plaque reads: you win! and the driver stops the buick hops to the back of the circle as the dust thinks of settling. and the winner gets to choose a now less-obscure prize.

but the buick continues circling. people come and go puzzled. they appreciate the buick and the precision of the circle and with little left to do they move on.

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-are you sure that's a buick?

-i'd say so

-dark blue?

-yep. what you figure he's doing?

-looks like he's watching that statue

-and driving in a circle?

-yeah. and driving in a circle

-what're we sposeto do?

-watch

-then what happens?

-we keep watching. then maybe we leave

-just watch? & leave?

-what else?

-well. aint them prizes back there?

-i don't know. we could go win a goldfish. it's a short line

-who's this statue lady?

-we could ride the ferris wheel again

-i think i seen her before

-i wonder what the goldfish would think of the tiltowhirl

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the statue named a beautiful lady. marble, patient stands at the center of a circle. the orbiting buick makes her dizzy if she tries to follow it with her eyes. she's not supposed to move.

she thinks her form rising from the cloud of dust must look interesting from outside the circle.

she is aware she is sculpture.

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how does a buick communicate? math. maybe. but if it's too old for that it's mechanical. the tone of the engine. rpms. morse code. tiretracks. who does a buick communicate with? other buicks. any automobile. the driver. passengers. pedestrians. does the buick pay any attention to the statues? does the buick prefer abstract sculpture or is it satisfied with any old carved rock? does the buick want to run the statue over like an unsuspecting pedestrian in the wrong place at the wrong time? or is the buick waiting for someone's pet?

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the driver is not wearing a helmet. he is wearing a pair of supple leather driving gloves. to prevent chafing and blisters. his seat has a furry cover. it is comfortable. there is a tape in the deck that keeps starting over. it's very hard for the driver to do anything about it without risking the buick running something down. the windows are up to keep the dust out. no one outside can hear the music. the driver is glad it's an album he likes.

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a goldfish can deal with the ferris wheel even after the pingpong balls and the very small bowl and the plastic bag for easy transportation and a child's jostling.

but the tiltowhirl might kill the goldfish.

you also can't feed goldfish cotton candy. it disagrees with their delicate constitutions. nor candy corn. funnel cake. hardboiled eggs. rice pilaf. hash browns.

fishfood and hamburger for goldfish if you can convince them they're carnivores willing to eat something so much larger than themselves.

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elephants never forget they say. ask the snakecharmer. he'll answer with his flute and wavering dance. the snake in a basket the snakecharmer wove himself. helps his magic to be so much the craftsman of his tools. a handmade flute that fits his dance. fingers match his sway. the easy utterances the serpent feels from the ground. basket and all. the snake mimics the charmer's movements. playing the flute of its forked tongue. mesmerized and hypnotising and who charms who? the charmer's subject becomes his crafty mirror and what passes for a performance. man and reptile become one in the flute.

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a picture of darkness mostly

(when in love with a statue
photographer's assignment)

the location is a corner intersection of two elaborate hallways. this is a room in a museum. smack in the middle of boring primarily religious art from europe. about 500 years old.

this room is the southeast corner of an east-facing building. to the south, the right, is a small room of the previously mentioned variety of art. portraits (maybe van rijn) to enamel painting on bronze. the color and composition of the enamel makes you think of cartoon merchandising dinnerware that tells a story on a plate.

to the left, the north, a hallway that gets older as you travel north. with doorways to different times and galleries.

behind the viewpoint of the photograph. to the west. another hallway of divergent art.

so this corner room. the room of the photograph. has a south-wall window.

and. for the sake of the photograph. it's dark in the museum. and dark outside. there's light called the moon carving out the focus of the photograph.

it's marble. from 1535. giovanni montorsoli. originally designed as a fountain for a rustic garden. montorsoli was a trusted collaborator of michaelangelo and was also a restorer of ancient sculpture.

and it's marble. cut to resemble. represent the inexplicable's lord and god. he's the man in charge of anarchy and debauchery.

this moon etched marble. this marble of clarity reclining. in his left hand his flute. the pan pipe. in his right hand a goblet. a hearty vessel.

his goatly legs at rest on a cornucopia. grapes and the like. legs with curled locks. and around his neck the hide of what looks like a hart. or another forest denizen.

the chest. his chest. smooth marble skin. well-defined musculature. loins expertly avoided.

his face. lively eyes wide. a grimace what resembles laughter. a curly domineering beard. lines to augment. and high on his brow two dark horns.

this lit darkly by moon
and he can come to life

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he sits quietly hiding in the right corners. the statue of pan. that marble of clarity reclining.

his legs are covered in curly locks right down to his cloven hooves. his face is not quite repose. he smiles. quietly in the corner as his fingers rest on his flute on the verge of raising instrument to lips (take that zamfir) and skipping off into the woods with the mummy from the basement. downstairs.

light glints off his horns. in his other hand a goblet. can't be emptied. though there's a wineskin somewhere. his beard rubs against his sculpted chest. in the shadowed corner.

he rises quietly leaving the right corners. the statue of pan. that marble of clarity in motion. his cloven hooves click lightly on the hard waxed floor.

he slides almost or glides his flute to lips for a soft song of leaving that matches hoofclicks in quiet halls.

and he's outside. not keeping off the grass. headed for the nearby woodland approximation.

he smells the zoo nearby. his tune picks up as his dance step quickens.
he is involved in a fullfledged frolic in the woods.

'who's at the zoo' he wonders 'after dark?'

a student maybe. an overworked employee in the children's zoo. the guy who cleans up bear shit. a girl who fell asleep in the elephant house.

that's where his frolic's leading him. the elephant house. he hops the stone fence into the zoo. finds himself facing a bronze indian. the indian pays him no mind. pan considers the bird house, the gorillas, reptiles. but he's after a mount, a way, a ride. as he walks a polar bear scolds him. the polar bear is embittered by boredom.

the polar bear is large enough to serve as a mount but pan does not want to trust himself to the largest carnivore on earth.

he continues. admires the big cats. saddened by this zoo's inadequate prison.

but he'll be freeing only one beast. this time.

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he walks through the heavy doors like they're not there or he's not there and then he's in the elephant house. he doesn't love the smell but there's worse. his hooves click. he plays a tune familiar to the building's denizens. a song. basic and soothing. contained in every animal's repertoire.

it's dark mostly with a few warm-colored single light bulbs in clip lamps. some large neurotic quadrupeds prefer the night with a light.

the elephant house doesn't contain only elephants. a rhino or three. maybe a giraffe and some other things. pan forgets the names. pan likes to forget the names. of.

pan is not playing the part of giraffe jockey.

pan sniffs around. stall to stall. acquainting himself with the elephants. they extend their prehensile snouts to get a whiff of the situation.

pan participates in this aromatic exchange. they share secrets. impending freedom. there's someone else here they tell him.

she stirs on her makeshift haybale mattress. why anyone not under direct dominion or influence of the dark ages would voluntarily sleep on scratchy messy hay pan does not know.

her bed is at the rear of one of the elephant stalls. all the elephants are concerned and protective as pan enters the stall. but the elephants do not attack or protest loudly. they are satisfied with pan's demeanor.

she stirs. a girl with curls aware of the extra additional presence and the communion of the building. (and a soft melody) most animals are jealous of elephants.

pan approaches. playing a tune written to tenderly wake sleeping maidens. a tune like a kiss or an immaculate caress.

she turns toward pan and slowly opens out of her dreaming.

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pan lowers his flute. she sees him kneeling before her. surprise.

-how are you?

-umm

-are you coming with me?

-umm

-you're invited you know. we're going to take a ride

-why are you here?

-to take a ride

-oh. what time is it?

-you don't want to know. at least i hope not. i know i don't want to know

-oh

-don't you speak?

-umm

-i thought so

-why are you here?

-to take a ride

-what kind of ride?

-a long one

-on what?

-an elephant

-and you're taking me?

-if you'll come

-i don't think i should let you take an elephant

-i don't either. but you could chaperon. or be a hostage

pan plays the gate of the stall open.

-let's go

-umm

and they are on the elephant's back headed down the corridor toward the large closed doors.

-have to get out of here before i show up

and the elephant walks through the doors. she braces for an impact. there is none.

they emerge from the fabric of the doors into an unforeseen wilderness.

-and they're off

and pan starts a traveling tune to keep flute, brute and brunette happy.

the elephant moves. galumphs really. a sort of saddle, riding platform. appears beneath them and they ride like impartial observers.

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statue and driver

there is a bar. if you look hard enough anywhere there is a bar.

he drinks a beer. she has scotch on the rocks. on the other end of the bar are several customers who've given up for the evening. they drink much and talk enough to keep themselves awake. one of the men will ride the tiltowhirl and puke. one of the women will take the tiltowhirl operator home and indulge him.

he watches her drink scotch. she is beautiful. the glasses hold their drinks together. the bartender brings them another round. the driver shrugs finishes the last swallow of his beer and starts the next.

the bar is air-conditioned and the jukebox is frantic. she likes the scotch.

-what should i call you?

-i'm the driver

-you're the one in the buick?

-yes

-why?

-someone's got to control the buick. don't know what it would do on its own

-but all that dust

-character

-it IS a nice car

-turns well and the windows keep the dust out

-but i don't know what to call you

-you're not supposed to move

-you arent supposed to stop

-you moved

-something had to happen

-will we go to your place?

-that's the only place i know

-what will we do?

-i have some records, an umbrella stand and some scotch

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and she's wondering all this time what's going on. she's got herself mostly convinced she's not awake. if she is and this is real she thinks she should play along. enjoy. it's not often this sort of thing isn't a dream.

and when it's not why

not make the most of it?

or, she thinks, she'll wake up.

she enjoys riding the elephant even if she finds the thought of it basically distasteful.

she appreciates the calm progress through the unidentifiable wilderness. she can tell it's fresh almost virgin woodland. it's nothing near the zoo.

it is a clear and cool but not cold night. the light from the sky is enough to navigate for the elephant and nearly enough to sightsee for the passengers.

the foliage is the color of green at night. with fluctuations for darker greens, for the greys of bark and the greys that come glued to night. & silver glint of moon shine off constant conifers.

yet. to determine the original, proper, true colors of all objects in this light. it's hard times you can't quite tell a green tree from a blue bush. and what color is that flower? it would take, to see truth in color, fuller light. like light of morning.

she wonders about the furry guy with the flute who is causing all this commotion. he seems familiar but she can't bring her memories of him to fore.

his skin is an odd color.

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the curls in the girl's hair move as the elephant moves. pan is briefly disappointed that he's sworn off mortal women. he assures himself she'll provide entertainment and intrigue as a traveling companion. the elephant trusts her without a song. pan sees that as a good tiding and thinks he can show her some of the things she's always taken for dreams.

they ride through the turning night as pan considers his destination.

the elephant they ride is a female. kept in the zoo once she was rescued from a failing circus where her treatment increasingly deteriorated as the circus lost its personnel.

the elephant is pleased to journey.

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-tell me. how did you come to sleep among the captives?

-i spent a long day working with the elephants and i still had work to do. finally i decided to rest. i sat down and i guess i fell asleep

-that's hardly the adventure i expected. are you their captor?

-i am their keeper. i feed and care for them

-and allow them to live in such conditions?

-better caged and fed than chained and beaten

-true. and they trust you

-am i still sleeping?

-if you are you're doing a very good job of disguising it

-hmm. where are we going?

-to the gypsies

-gypsies?

-they're having a feast

-they don't eat elephants do they?

-no. they prefer curious girls

-and well they should. i hear elephants are gamey to the taste

-perhaps. they dine on ignorant beasts

-like curious girls

-and goats

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pan plays a happy tune that is their laughter.

the elephant knows the way. heard it in a lullaby or been there before.

this quiet land of night is made for travel. it holds few native inhabitants. primarily it is peopled by restless folk in transit. and a few who've forgotten the trail and live at its side to aid passersby.

this quiet land of night is how to get where you're going for uncommon travelers impatient with roads and mappable motion.

scattered through this land of night are way stations for the tired steed and for intent riders.

available at the way stations are water, provisions, tall tales, boarding and new mounts should a traveler desire one.

most often the mounts are as intent on their journeys as the riders and they cannot be left behind.

there is a rough trade in misplaced mounts. few of the available beasts are conventional transportation. large cats, giant birds, talking turtles, overwrought hyenas and flying fish, among others, make for complicated journeys when the beasts have somewhere they want to go.

worse yet when all they want to do is wander.

with such a mount you can be sure to find no destination you would expect.

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driving a buick in circles around a statue. the driver sings along to the album that keeps starting over. he has the songs memorized and he switches between the main vocal and the harmony. does not play air guitar. or any other instrument. he is driving.

the buick is relentless. the statue is relentless. everything composing the scene has drifted toward relentlessness. the tape deck is relentless.

the statue also wonders about the tiltowhirl and the ferris wheel. it goes so high. she's never ridden the rides or played the games or eaten the cotton candy. it seems to her she's been surrounded by this buick as long as she can remember. if there was something before it was forgetful. and now she's never even murdered a goldfish.

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the tiltowhirl operator is a drunk. he runs the machinery at unsafe speeds. such speeds make the tiltowhirl much more exciting. especially since you don't know the machinery is running at unsafe speeds, the operator is a drunk and how precariously you rest, as the momentum of the machinery rests, on the balance between a great fucking ride and disaster.

the tiltowhirl operator is also a very lucky man. since he's never killed a load of passengers and the ladies find his job thrilling. rarely do they consider that in order to operate the tiltowhirl the operator cannot ride it. then their fantasies are dashed upon the rocks and they go back to the bar and wait for someone to buy them a drink.

the bar is a funny place. it's rare to find someone who doesn't work at an attraction in the bar. the floozies after the tiltowhirl guy and other equipment groupies don't count.

occasionally in saunters captain america or some other B-grade suburbanite who's had a long day and just needs a cold beer and a few minutes to decompress before he goes back out to face the family and cotton candy and goldfish.

these guys always wanted to run away from home. never had the balls to do it. once in a while one of these guys decides that's what he's gonna do. and once in a while that's a good decision. his wife hates him and the kids aren't really his.

other times the guy sits through a couple beers. talks about running away. leaves a nice tip and goes back out to find denise and the kids.

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Barnaby & Aloysius

Barnaby & Al. two men. bachelors both.

Al's late 40s early 50s acts older. a bit dim.

Barnaby is younger. late 20s early 30s. wiser, smarter. still looks for some wisdom from the direction of Al. a certain kind of simple (a loaded word) philosophy.

Al moved to this town for a friend who has since moved away and no longer talks to Al.

Al was a tractor mechanic. then he inherited a large farm he wasn't much interested in farming. he moved when oil was struck on his property.

with all that money he spends most of his time at the bar. but he only drinks on the weekends. rest of the time it's royal crown cola or tab or something basically undrinkable. he and Barnaby met at the bar.

Barnaby's a general handyman but he wishes he was a housepainter. sometimes he gets a painting job and he's excited to wear his spattered white overalls. he's good at housepainting. it's just that people don't think of him much as a housepainter. and he doesn't work for the guys who hire out housepainters.

he has to advertise himself as a handyman or else people forget who he is. Barnaby the handyman. have toolbelt will travel.

he even fixes toasters.

Al helps Barnaby out times Barnaby gets a goodsize job. Al refuses to be paid and Barnaby slips a little cash in Al's toolbelt even though Al doesn't need it.

Al and Barnaby spend a lot of time at a place called the Beacon. burgers and beer. once in a while they go to the Artesian. though the girls really aren't much to look at.

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-where you been?

-havin a drink

-ah. now goddammit. you said you was gonna take me with you this time

-oh. i must've forgot

-c'mon. take me there now

-i don't wanna go back so soon

-then show me where it is

-find it yourself. if you look hard enough you'll find it

-i aint never found it yet

-i guess you haven't been lookin hard enough

-who'd you see?

-the usual. few ride operators, a midget clown, the bartender and all them
floozyes

-i'd like to get me aholt of some of them floozyes

-i saw a girl i used to date in high school

-one of them floozyes?

-no. don't get so excited

-was she runnin with that tiltowhirl punk? i been lookin for a reason to beat his
face in

-no. she was talkin to some guy i didn't recognise. he was wearing sunglasses.
she smiled at me

-then what?

-they left

-then what?

-i drank

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the curvature, she says, must have something to do with it

something based on curvature or a parabola seems to be repeating. seems to her.

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and she is the statue and she is the curlyheaded girl. the curious one.

the statue refers to the buick. the circle. the steering wheel. and the music heard only in the cabin of the buick. the dust. the obscure prizes.

the girl with the curls refers to the constant state of night in this quiet land of night as she rides the elephant with pan. the light quiet does not change. she is not talking about her curls.

the elephant is driving. no one else has control. pan's flute makes suggestions. the elephant is trodding its path. the elephant does not need to be controlled.

the girl and the statue watch separately. keep their eyes open.

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no one's beard is shorn. the driver doesnt really have one. stubble mostly. and pan's beard is relentless. not as curly as the locks on his legs.

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-where are we going? says the girl with the curls.

-to a party. says pan.

-right. but where here?

-i don't really know that. [consults map] but i think we just passed 10,000 years of cold russian nights.

-what?

-ask the elephant. she's driving anyway. i know she's got to be there. we're just hitching a ride

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the elephant stops near a water hole. pan and the girl dismount. the elephant grazes. tearing leaves from a tree and feeding them to herself. the elephant drinks.

she does not create a shower with her trunk.

pan plays a song for pit stops. it sounds of idle motion. pan brings the girl flowers from the edge of the water. in this quiet land of night it is hard to tell the exact color of the flowers.

she is hungry.

pan tells her there are hardboiled eggs. in a basket. on the riding platform. on the elephant.

when the elephant is ready they climb aboard. once moving they open the basket.

yes there is a saltshaker.

¢

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avoidance or something else
kept the buick from colliding
with the statue or anything else.

the driver's control may have
something to do with this. or else
the buick's in control and we cant
have that. no telling what would
happen.

her eyes could not keep focused
on the buick. by way of avoidance
or stone. it would have made
the statue dizzy to follow the circle
and the dust and the buick.

she's not supposed to move.

the driver. held in orbit by the orbit.
circles. he's not supposed to stop.
and he's avoiding it.

¢

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the orphan.

lives at a weigh station. a way station.

taken in by the owners. a misplaced infant. on a doorstep or in the bulrushes.
mislaid like so much scrap material for a quilt. or pillows.

so there he stayed. young and without a path in this quiet land of night. he made
trips with his adopting father to other worlds. other ways. none were his. this
orphan.

he mopped and learned to put shoes on a steed. the ostriches gave him trouble.
the gypsies taught him to sing and play the instruments. all of them.
horns & strings & bellows.

he wondered where to wander. whence to alliterate. destination. yes. but he
didn't have a name for it. the gypsies told him there's no homes for orphans.

but he stayed. in this land of night. by the way side. talked to travelers and
mended their saddles.

everyone in this quiet land of night must be going somewhere or already done
their going. and the orphan thinks he hasn't done his.

so there's a setup for him. waiting as he does. the right way station. the
goatfooted baloonman with the curly legs and the curlyheaded girl saunter in on
their elephant.

the orphan knows elephants don't like shoes.

pan and the girl whistle their way to the bar.
¢

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the driver and the beautiful woman called a statue stand at the bar with their drinks. they talk. mostly about what happens at the other attractions. and how they compare to their own exhibition. the statue smiles at a man.

another man. a performer. wearing a tuxedo jacket, shirt, tie and cummerbund. no pants. dagger at his hip. sallies up to the bar and presents the driver and the statue a card. an invitation to a party. with driving directions.

the performer implores their attendance. do come please. the statue and the driver look at each other and smile and say sure. the performer thanks them and walks away.

-well. now we don't have to go to my place
-oh and i was so looking forward to that umbrella stand
-there's a party
-will it be fun?
-my place is a mess anyway
-i don't remember ever going to a party
-it should be fun. folks around here like to have fun
-parties should be fun

¢

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-there's a party later

-yeah?

-let's go ride the tiltowhirl

-when?

-now. i saw it going awhile ago

-when is the party?

-later

-where are we going?

-to the tiltowhirl

-ah. now dammit. i don't wanna ride that damn tiltowhirl again. how many times we rode it already?

-only six or seven

-aint that enough?

-the tiltowhirl isnt here all the time. we should get as much use out of it as possible

-hell that guy's a drunk

-earlier you said he was a punk. which is it?

-and a punk. both

-i wish you could win something for riding the tiltowhirl

-then you'd never get off

-i guess you're right

-you'd never see the other attractions and you'd never show me that bar

¢

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Barnaby and Al proceed to the tiltowhirl. the drunk and punk operator lets them on for free.

Barnaby loves the tiltowhirl.

Al does not. but he cannot pass up a free ride. especially from the likes of that punk drunk tiltowhirl operator.

they are tilted and whirled and spinned and spun. Barnaby is joyful and Al is nearly undone. the operator's luck holds. no one is killed. the ride ends.

Barnaby and Al exit the tiltowhirl. Barnaby thanks the operator for the ride.

they walk toward a concession stand. Barnaby wants cotton candy. Al will have a beer.

Barnaby flirts with the young lady behind the counter. Al grumbles and drinks.

¢

Barnaby: wanna come to a party?

young lady: what kind of party?

Barnaby: i don't know. all i got is this invitation

young lady: well i'm not doing anything after work

Barnaby: good. can i have some cotton candy too?

young lady: sure. where should we meet?

Barnaby: we're parked over by the tractors. Al likes to look at the tractors.
so we'll wait for you there

young lady: good. i'll bring a bottle

Barnaby: oh yeah. and bring a friend

¢

¢

-well?

-well what?

-well what about that party?

-it's later

-yeah. and what else?

-well. when i was in the bar some funny little carny bastard give me this invitation

-and you think we should go?

-and i think we should go

-let me see it

-it's got driving directions

-fancy paper

-i got you a date

-what?

-a date. i invited that girl and told her to bring a friend

-i hope she don't bring no midget clown or bearded lady or nothin like that

-no. she got the idea. she's meeting us over by the tractors

-i like to look at them tractors

-that's what she said

-huh?

-that's what i told her

-oh. i should build me one like they got. i could outbuild any of them damn midget clowns

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the statue and the driver go to the arcade. the statue is good at these ripoff games. the driver watches her.

she is beautiful as she spends her quarters and wins her prizes.

they move on. the driver shoots ducks from a row. the statue rings a bell with a very large sledgehammer. they win ridiculous prizes. lose at some games.

the statue wants a goldfish.

the driver does not object.

they get beer and footlong hotdogs from the concession stand. the young lady gives them free pink cotton candy.

they make their way to the goldfish. there's something to do with pingpong balls. at first they fail. but surely they win in the end and they free a goldfish from a very small bowl. recapture it in a plastic bag and jostle it over to the buick.

the present some of their other prizes to passing children.

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ends up the orphan asks the curlyheaded girl for a sewing lesson. he's had some trouble with buttons and his adopting mother told him he should learn to sew them on himself.

pan and the girl whistle their way to the bar.

the orphan tends to the elephant. lets the elephant do what she wants. the elephant knows nothing about buttons.

the orphan, having performed his duties to the best of his ability, enters the bar. pan and the girl sit at a table with their drinks. pan plays another song for pit stops. a song about stopping. and drinking.

the orphan walks toward their table. an instrument he hasn't learned. he interrupts his own beeline for a pitcher of mead and cups. with tray and pitcher and vessels he truly approaches pan and the girl with the curls. the trance of the flute pauses as he joins them. now three at table making their acquaintances.

-mead! thanks m'boy. now the evening can begin. says pan as he and the girl forget their first drinks whatever they may have been.

-i thought we could talk and drink. says the orphan as he fills the cups and distributes.

-what better? says pan. music. do you play?

-i do play. but not that one. i have others in my room

-what instruments do you play? says the girl just before she has her first ever sip of mead which directly and swiftly precedes her first ever gulp of mead.

-all of them. says the orphan. all of them i've seen at least. this one is new

-and you? what instruments do you play? says pan to the girl.

-none. she says. sometimes i sing

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driving a statue in a buick around a circle. post haste revolutions. the statue is a beautiful lady in the passenger seat. the goldfish is experiencing a jostle on the hump of the front seat. the driver is in control.

driving in statues around a buick in circles. a circle. traceable orbit and dust. the album in the tape deck continues to repeat. a dark blue buick. the driver sings along. the statue is tapping on the dash.

in the backseat are large stuffed prizes. cartoon animals. plush brutes. repeating songs. a bereaved discarded 8 track on the floorboard.

according to the driving directions on the invitation the party is a good distance away. they have their winnings stowed in the buick and they have had their fill of the attractions. they could be a little drunk.

they agree to start out on their way to the party. the driver knows the names of all the roads. the roads are dark and curving. seemingly ceaseless.

the driver is still not sick of the repeating album. it has become part of the environment. the natural sounds of the interior of a buick. the driver does turn the music down to make conversation with the statue possible.

there is some cotton candy left.

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redundancy in technicolor

it's difficult to cross bridges without burning them. gives off plenty of light.

it's difficult to cross bridges covered, overrun by an onrushing river swelling out of its banks. this kind of bridge does not easily burn.

bridges become a delicate subject

quaint covered numbers or vast suspension bridges built for crossing. avoidance. who wants to get wet? who has a car that can get wet?

(the existence of roads perpetuates itself. need roads because there are roads. there are roads because there are cars like there are and need roads to drive them cars on.)

bridges are for crossing

remote rope bridges. gatekeepers who ask pointless questions and charge a toll. trolls that live under and pose a threat. take another kind of toll. dogwalkers, joggers and jumpers. men with rampant imaginations who cross bridges daring them to become delicate. men what walk to walk. cross to cross. keep from that welling confluence.

the old red bridge down in the bottom. iron. bolted together. finally washed out in a series of violent storms.

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-so. you think they're comin?

-yeah, Al, i do

-i guess it's nice we get a few minutes to look at these tractors

-what kind you gonna build?

-i'm partial to them good ole green ones

-john deere?

-yep. they take to special treatment like a duck or one of them floozies

-if you put enough money into em you might get a good ride?

-somethin like that. cept tractors aint so durn persnickety

-i never met a woman i thought was like a tractor

-i never met a tractor i couldnt fix. hey is that them comin this way?

-where?

-over by the arcade

-no. that's a man and a beautiful woman

-a guy can dream cant he?

-there they are

-where?

-comin outta the fortune teller's tent

-is she bringin me a goddam gypsy?

-looks like it. but hell we never did make it to the fortune teller. maybe we can get
our palms read

-you and your tiltowhirl

-i got you a free ride and a date tonight. quit hasslin me

-fuck you. hell that ole gypsy's good lookin. you better hold my wallet

-gladly

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young lady: he's a local. if living here is what makes a local. word is he's loaded

gypsy woman: and the other one?

young lady: i've seen him before. he likes the tiltowhirl. seems like a good guy to go to a party with

they're in the fortune teller's tent. this young lady and this middleage gypsy. the whole carnival's thinned out. folks going home. or gone. to put the kids to bed. others off to find more to do on a good weekend night. or tuesday or whichever night it is.

gypsy woman: hmm... you're trying to invite me to a party i'm already invited to. you want me to go with two strangers. men i've never seen.

young lady: they do have invitations. you're the fortune teller. use your crystal. check em out

so she does. conjures up an exterior shot of two men loitering looking at the tractors and having a conversation. enclosed in her cloudy crystal ball.

gypsy woman: i suspect they are talking about us but i cant seem to get any audio

young lady: what'd i tell you? they're not bad

they finish up in the tent. gaze at the mystical mirror on the canvas wall. smile at their reflections. smile at each other and walk out toward the tractors. the young lady gripes about her job at the concession stand. the gypsy tells her to come up with an act of her own. something where she can show a lot of skin. and be mysterious.

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the driver navigates the buick down smooth winding byways. there is no direct route where they're going. no superhighway exit says: party!

they come up on the neon beck and call of the Beacon. the driver answers by guiding the buick into one of the many unfilled spots on the gravel parking lot. the buick stops. the driver and the statue emerge.

this is somewhere he thinks she should go. don't want to be too early to that party.

indoors it is evident some of the men have a great endurance. they've been at the bar all day. sticking to their stools with a few trips to the pisser and the barbarian pinball. three or four of them have purchased lotto tickets for this evening's drawing. on the single nineteen inch black and white Zenith is a hazy version of the news. numbers upcoming.

there are tables with uncomfortable padded metal chairs. and there is the bar with stools that resemble chairs with very long legs. they are wellpadded.

the driver escorts the statue to the bar where there is a covey of empty stools and excuses himself to the john.

in the hall beside the john are cases of empty beer bottles reinstalled in the cardboard from whence they came by brand and color.

in the bathroom. to dry your hands. a crankable towel threaded like a ribbon through a wallmounted machine. when the whole track of the towel is trod it can be removed and tossed in the washing machine. this has not been done recently.

when the driver returns the statue has ordered. for herself more scotch. scratch the rocks. make it a double she repeats from the bar earlier. for the driver a pint of schlitz since it seems he likes beer on tap. and the only other choices are Bud and bud light. which he cant possibly like, she reasons.

he drinks his pint quickly. warm schlitz is no friend of his. the jukebox is slim pickins for anything that isnt pop-country or otherwise offensive.

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they drink. at the bar reading smartass notices and beer signs. the labels on the rows of hard liquor bottles.

in walks a regular. they see him in the mirror. a few men at the far end of the bar greet him. it's almost too late to buy a lottery ticket they say. he waves and says nothing. he walks to the cash register on the bar near the driver and the statue. he asks the man behind the bar to break a twenty for the jukebox.

his name is x. they call him y. his middle initial. he thanks the man behind the bar for the change. leaves a five and is given his first pint of the evening. before making off to the jukebox the statue catches his eye in a funny way and he's sure he should talk to her.

x- anythin yall wanna hear?

this gets their attention. the statue and the driver look at x.

s- i'm sorry?

x- i'm going to the jukebox. you got any requests?

she looks puzzled.

d- why don't we go with him

x- yeah come along

these three walk to the jukebox.

x- there's a lot on here i don't much care for and it can be a damn finnick
contraption. i think i play songs out of habit.

s- what is it?

d- a jukebox

s- what is it?

x- a jukebox

d- it plays music

x- i can usually get it to work for me

s- is it an instrument?

x- i'm no jukebox mechanic

d- no. it plays music that's already happened

s- oh. it's magic

d- no. like the music in the buick. it's recorded

x- she's not from around here is she?

s- you could say that

d- you could

x- so who do you like?

s- i like the music of a stream in the forest

x- aint got that. but there's johnny cash

d- walkin after midnight?

x- got her too

s- what is it?

x&d- a jukebox

x- tell you what. you watch what i'm doing here and then when you hear the music you'll understand what's going on

d- it's music that already happened

s- like an echo?

x- you could say that

d- you could

¢

something happens. a shift in the direction of airflow. something imperceptible in the pattern of light or reality. something subtle like the furnace switching on. but you don't hear it. you feel it. or more apt you sense it. an occurrence. something unseen takes place. an old and triggerhappy alternate universe takes place.

¢

x and s and d choose a bevy of songs. some folky country tunes and the few reasonable alternatives on a list of mediocre at best music. they sit at an uncomfortable table because it's hard to talk three abreast at the bar. even with stools that resemble chairs with very long legs. their drinks are brought to them.

x begins to tell a story.

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the curtains drawn. a warm afternoon breeze disturbs them. inside the room. dimness. a little cooler than outside.

the room. wood plank floor. rope/mud chinked log walls. a few pieces of rustic furniture. a door with a wooden latch operated by a thin leather thong. an old rope bed. wooden frame with a network of tensed ropes to support the several straw tick mattresses. less the squeaking of metal springs. endowed instead with the nautical creak of tight and moving ropes.

through the door the other room of the cabin. on the wall with the door a large stone fireplace. built of local stone. glacial remnants mortared together to produce a working whole. the fireplace serves all the necessities of cooking and baking and heat. set up for all functions.

on the mantle a pair of coal oil lamps. a mold for candles. a clock without a minute hand. and the requisite hawken rifle. a powder horn. an outdated relic from muzzleloading ancestry.

a cupboard from back east filled with provisions. canned peaches, dried beans and various preserves from a well-maintained garden.

curtains drawn or open are curtains. fabric, sometimes in name alone, to cover and crowd windows. open they're decoration. closed they become blinds. closed there must be a reason for it. they become suspicious and utilitarian. what's outside or in. what matters is which side of the curtains you take up. inside or out. open or drawn.

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the parade ground. muddy. and there have been a lot of horses.

the brigadier walks diagonally across paying little attention to the mud.

a battered but prevailing lieutenant walks through the mud from another direction to rendezvous with the brigadier.

the brigadier, as he steps on a corn cob, muses over the fact that he is in charge of a fort. one of his very own with an impressive garrison, troop of cavalry, a very strategic position and fresh cold spring in one corner.

on the neighboring range they keep a small herd of beef. the indians will steal cattle but they'd rather have horses. or rifles.

the brigadier knows the lieutenant hates fighting the indians. the lieutenant got his life saved by one once and developed an unhealthy affinity for the savages. the brigadier thinks he felt that way once. but orders are orders for a man of this blue union cloth. the army cant have their forts running amok thinking for themselves.

but the lieutenant is no coward. his sabre has seen light. and is sheathed in blood.

the brigadier chuckles at his musing. takes a serious tone and asks the lieutenant for his report.

ah yes and the cannons at his disposal. some mobile. some stationary. kegs of powder lying about staying dry. hopefully avoiding discarded cigarette ends.

to be fired from explosive muzzles are cannonballs from the stacks displayed beside the cannon. as well as shot, fragments of glass and rusty nails. door hinges and discarded cutlery. a good way to get rid of rubbish and trouble marauding savages.

the brigadier is pleased.

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-this here's what they call a buffalo gun

-i'm sorry?

-it's a fifty caliber breechloader with adjustable sights to make up for longer distances

-oh the curvature of the earth and all that?

-no. the inaccuracy of the bullet. the bullet drops appreciably as it travels.

you can't hit a buffalo below the belt. it just makes him mad

-what do i want to shoot a buffalo for?

-cause if you miss him he'll chase you down and have you for dinner and i

don't guess you'd like his diet.

-fifty caliber. that's half an inch isn't it?

-yep. fast as a speeding bullet. or a jackrabbit

-how apt

-you gotta take your target serious. this here's a weapon what can kill

-what about indians?

-waste of ammunition. best leave them to the army. that's what they're here

for. but there's open season on mormons if you can find a small enough

group of em

-who's gonna be shooting at me?

-shouldn't be anybody. what do you think this is uncivilized country?

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the cold armor of a knight wouldn't fit in this hot weather of dust and canyons. it's almost the edge of the desert and the hills are littered with fertile valleys and greenery resembling oases if this country was closer to the desert.

his horse corners on a dime. without a road. to descend the switchback into a particularly fertile valley.

it's middleground. a meeting. confluence of separate climates dictated by the relative benevolence of topography. it's home. or home for now. which is about as close as he ever gets to home. where the hat hangs long enough to pause or drip dry after a thunderstorm.

he's wearing chaps. a buckskin vest. his shirt is a worn blue cotton. looks like an army uniform. it is. his first one. shirt. worn, faded, state issue. he's just finished his commission. a few years as a respected but nonadvancing lieutenant. he was a good soldier. in the field. performing his duties to the letter. but his ideas prevented him from moving above his rank of lieutenant. back at HQ they just couldn't see allowing him any more rank or file. they saw him as a risk. less in his leaving. politically. since the lieutenant got his life saved by one of them savages and he might be called a sympathizer. nothing should get in the way of westward progress expansion genocide.

so what to do for this former lieutenant after a less than illustrious career as an officer and gentleman?

he told them. the ones in charge, the brigadier. he was on his way back east where he said he was from. he saw the world. the west. he missed the ocean. because he knew that was what they wanted to hear. he relinquished the better part of his government issue belongings greatly reducing the sum of his personal property. a few things he kept as souvenirs or in light of their practical application. things like epaulets and clusters of metal foliage did him no duty outside this man's army.

but going back east was not what he did.

his combination government issue/real life wardrobe makes him look like an army surplus devotee. or an historical re-enactment gone wrong.

he wears horseman's gloves. one of his cavalry accoutrements. they are good gloves. especially for riding. he tore the yellow piping from his hat and kept it on.(the hat)

he had trouble deciding about the sabre. a weapon that never failed him as much as it had shed blood he didn't like shedding. it makes him feel secure and it rarely misfires. but it is an automatic symbol of time spent serving and slaughtering indians.

he knows he'll eventually encounter more of that beleaguered race.
it is his intention.

like he's switching sides or at least lending an elbow to the cause.

and still. what to do?

he stows his sabre on his horse. leaves it concealed to consider its use. maybe it's a souvenir. maybe it's a tool he won't use. maybe it's a sharpened blade whose gutter will not again taste of flesh and blood. he's not going to use it to cut kindling.

the boots are black. in these years they are ideal footwear for riding and that's what he does commission or not. they're an automatic symbol. still less aggressive than even a sheathed blade.

how'd this particular valley get to be home?

good thing that's part of the story.

he was leaving the parade ground. and no if you were wondering this isn't at all like 'branded' with a dishonorable discharge and stripes stripped from unwilling shoulders and a sabre broke over a knee.

he turned his mount out of the log gates of the fort. farewells said. muddy parade ground left behind. the brigadier sad to see a worthwhile soldier leave the flock.

the lieutenant. ex. had to head a direction made it look like he was heading back east.

that he did.

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he reins his horse east. there's a fair size town has a railroad station couple days ride in that direction. he has provisions for several days just in case. of course he has no plan to ride the rails.

he rides for a day. camps out a night and continues. the dust makes friendly clouds at the horse's hooves. the horseshoes click on occasional stones. the climate here is multiple.

the lieutenant crosses a rise and sees what can only be called a fine lookin valley and in its midst from an obscured stone chimney hidden by a comfortable grove of trees wafts a thin line of beneficent smoke.

when the lieutenant first sees the smoke he is apprehensive. has a few moments hesitation. as he descends the switchback toward the smoke that it might be the smoke of a savage campfire or worse a cavalry detachment. but he doesn't recall any troops in this vicinity and he's playing it as a hunch he's got little to worry over.

proably a cabin he thinks. some brave settler living outside most everything.

could be any of many things but this is his thought and he plays his hunch to the hilt. he banks on chance.

as luck has it chance is strong on the foreign market this sunny morning.

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the transcontinental railroad killed as many injuns and buffalo as any other factor in the west. more. the railroad was the drive of westward expansion. and it was a racket. a moneymaking scheme ramrodded by crooked politicians and already wealthy businessmen in the name of manifest destiny. sound familiar? it's one more ploy to line the pockets of free trade with tax dollars making sure not to leave political bodies flapping in the cold/wind.

what good did it do?

it made it possible to travel coast to coast without hitting the water. granted it was expensive and dangerous and uncomfortable for most passengers. but they have nothing to do with the men making the money and getting the land grants along the way. except it's the public money and the public land. but what matter that?

and anyway is it the public land? the indians lived out there in the wilderness chasing buffalo and living the life of nomadic savages before the iron horse came trudging through.

what's someone like our sympathetic lieutenant going to do about it? in the end: nothing. but he'll try. looking for a fight that's for the right reasons. or for helping someone else. or to settle a debt. looking to stir up trouble and prevent or slow a little genocide before the term existed. it was making the west safe for god's intended inhabitants. blueblooded blue-collar upstanding citizens unwittingly turning a buck for the guys what already got the money. or let's get real and realize the criminal element. and well... adventurers. because there were. there was space to do it. the way it should be done.

of course the transcontinental railroad wasn't built right in the first place, despite the extraordinary expense. a few years later shoddy construction and superfluous mileage of iron rail had to be replaced and straightened out. costing the public more'n the entire project shoulda cost. for the second time benefiting the same wheelers and dealers and much of the same batch of crooked politicians.

the indian wars cleared the way for white civilization and proved that generally peace loving nomads set on living quiet lives were no match for a modern military hardened by civil war.

surprise.

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when in love with a statue

a user's manual. instructions. restoration guidelines.
if she's standing there in front of you. there she is.
and yes you're in love. how can you avoid it?

stand back.

have a gander. leave the goose in the barnyard.
please. don't tweak those tempting sculpted nipples.
at least not until later. that's no way to introduce
yourself. maybe after you've offered kisses and flowers.
and she's consented. or moved toward you.

the statue is relentless. constant.
and you can walk around it. to see
what's there. i don't suggest
a plaster bust. but there's a nice dancer
by degas. a bit young maybe. but that's
up to you.

when you've established an orbit and you know
what she's made of (even if it's a guess)
you can stop circling.
you're not supposed to stop.
if you do she'll begin to move.
but that's what you're waiting for. a response.
and the relentless is called a beautiful woman
and she's come to you.

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when in love with a statue:
a statue's guide

when the stone crumbles away
there's flesh underneath.

like rick moranis in ghostbusters
you've got to emerge.

¢

¢

the statue is a fortress. could have been a fountain in a rustic garden.

the statue is relentless.

when the album repeats it's not like the same side
of a record playing over and over. you get the whole picture.

the beautiful woman stands in the center of a circle.
driving in circles around a statue.
a dark blue buick under control.

the driver watches her.

the stone and her skin are confused which is more real.
the statue took you traveling. at least that's what's in your head.
sings the driver when he hears nothing else.

he can't tell what she's wearing. can't tell if she's wearing anything.

that nude clarity of marble. or skin. or sight.
that naked skin soft to the thankful touch.

the cold of stone smooth as a touch on the cheek.

dust like mist follows the sound of a turning circle.

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the driver's mind wanders this way doing double duty while he listens to the story.

he wonders. examines the storyteller's dentition. rubs the back of his neck where
he still feels like he's wearing the helmet. he wore it so long.

he sips his second beer in rhythm with the story. times are, hearing a story about
a man on a horse, a guy needs a drink.

¢

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the stables at the way station are not built to house elephants. as the elephants are not built to be shod. or sew.

the stables are all too small. so the elephant is left to pace the length of the barn. from stall to stall shaking noses with the occupants. beasts of burden.

the choreographed pace of the elephant. one end of the hall to the other.

where ya headed? was the most common question between these cornucopic steeds.

an ostrich, llama, caribou, horses to the gills. no fish, no buicks and how the hell do you ride an ostrich anyway? (very carefully)

at the end of the hall. a dusty abandoned phaeton. a conveyance. a sort of horsedrawn buggy. named after the mythical offspring of the sun god. (helios) another chariot with a misnomer.

sleepless mounts paw patiently at the ground. they wait to be let loose. wait to be released to follow their preset courses to their natural destinations.

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the lieutenant dismounts. he rode up to the cabin and no one shot at him. he pets the active pup playing at his feet. she is courteous and patient.

the lieutenant walks around the building where he hears the chopping block in action. she falls in. walks in his shadow.

as the lieutenant rounds the corner he sees a man splitting wood. the lieutenant says hello.

the man stops his splitting. turns to the greeting and returns 'h'lo'

the lieutenant introduces himself. the man with the axe has been teetering between apprehension and gregariousness. he falls off the edge of occam's razor and says 'you look like half a soldier'

-and half a man says the lieutenant

the man with the axe laughs.

-i'm Marvin. we don't get much comp'ny round here. you wanna join us for supper?

-us?

-Oscar should be back direckly. he went to have a look at the stock.

-sounds good to me. how can i help?

-Oscar's playin at cook this week. we'll have to wait'll he gets back to see what's doin to eat. til then i'm just splittin a little wood while i'm restin. you could tote a little inside if you gotta have somethin to do

the lieutenant goes inside with an armful of wood. he sees the woodbox near the fireplace. unloads his arm. stokes up the fire and walks out for another armful.

after his third trip the woodbox is full and the fire is in fine shape to cook later on.

'Oscar. he's from back east' says Marvin as the lieutenant returns to the woodpile emptyhanded.

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prospecting on a quiet hill

Marvin used to be a prospector. he gave it up with a burnished fortune and a weakening interest in money or the hard work of mining. or the harder work of protecting a claim. finding gold in the earth. so he gave it up.

founded a fair homestead. land and stock and home. out in what's still wild country. got in touch with his friends and relatives who'd gone back east.

he wrote for hired hands when he needed them. but he wasn't running much stock anyway. then a letter from a friend. 'Oscar's coming to visit. he needs to get out of here.' and Oscar showed up before Marvin's response could get back east. Marvin was looking forward to the company.

when Oscar left Marvin would hire full time hands or sell all his stock and live an even quieter life. or whatever else ended up happening.

Marvin has made a name for himself with his willingness.

every time he turns around someone hears his name.

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her name is a statue. next to mine over a bridge.
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Oscar has an old Russian immigrant grandfather. a man with half a fortune who married his grandmother when she was a young american lady.

this man from st. petersburg put a lot into raising Oscar.

he taught Oscar some russian. and how to fire a pistol.

Marvin's old dog had pups. once they were big enough to roam around Oscar saw they had a dog worth naming.

Oscar had a puppy his grandfather named Laika when he was a child. it means barker.

like spike, spot, rover. in eastern europe.

so, for this dog worth naming, Oscar had a name.

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-what's that dog's name?

-that there's lay-kuh. it means bark in somethin like rushin. Oscar give him that name.

-isn't that a she?

-yep. but he's an alright dog anyway.

-is Oscar russian?

-naw. his granddad come over from there. married him up a pretty lady.

the lieutenant pets the dog.

Laika, huh? he says to Laika

she barks enthusiastically, wriggles in his hands and licks his face.

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a story about pan. like a book with an echo. a call with a built in response.
like a liturgy.

he's in the woods. a forest. all woods are the same to him. with lusty eyes he
pursues a trail. to find there what is not expected.

on the track of some beast. quarry. a gentle hart in the woods.

he comes upon a cave that calls for his attention. a cave with an occupant. an
occupant without hooves as feet. without bristling tines as a headdress.

he sheathes his hunting knife. persnickety blade that moans for beastly blood.
like a demon sword. a lust of amplitude to equal pan's lust for the inexplicable.
the dagger comes quiet in deference.

pan's other lust takes charge.

pipe to lips. syrinx sounds to the mouth of the cave. the echo of breathing
escapes from that craven chamber in time to music of the flute. a trustworthy
geological formation. the cavern is a friend of pan's. the occupant's breath braces
for the panic of pursuit.

she names her captor something that wants to eat her. something she calls evil.
she hears his cloven step. branches, stone and mud support approaching feet.
she's around the corner playing at laying in wait. hiding. and she hears the
calming tune of the pipe.

and mixed into the melody

another song that cries her name. calls more than a truce. calls her to arms. calls
her to his arms. calls her to lay in wait.

he's past the threshold now. near the corner to turn. to find there what is not
expected. he smells her hearing. hears her breathing change. sees her as he
turns the corner.

she sees him as he turns the corner and knows his name.
she's supposed to be afraid. but she is there and escape is just an echo.

he crouches, squats, kneels beside her. plays his tune to her body. as it rests
before him. plays the length of her form. and each line to compose the whole.

her fear is gone like blood goes thin with aspirin. dissolves to seduction.

she lifts herself to caress his flute hand. and that is the end of this song. and they
begin the next.

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last night jeff and i walked across the williamsburg bridge as the sun was coming down.

the gentle call of the bridge. to cross. to get there.

as we curtsied to the embedded skyline.

bridges are for crossing.

on foot it's a slow trek that allows for sightseeing. like a pedestrian tourist. travelers at home in a strange country. up and down the incline trodding stable architecture. functional sculpture dedicated to the gods of traffic, transport and motion. transit.

the triboro bridge is no inviting footpath. no game trail through the forest. a bridge built for commerce and confusion. with teeth like a first rate deep-sea monster called a fish that produces its own eerie chemical light.

when a better road is built traffic increases and someone incurs a toll.

there's no relief from the increase, the confusion or the toll.

no matter the number of better roads the toll does not escape.

bridges are for crossing. bridges become a delicate subject.

what's below.

a declarative clause. or a question.

the bridge built to cross. but what? some body of discourteous water that won't let you through but cant protest if you go over. or if you can walk on water.

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interrogative torture.

who are you? why are you on this bridge? where's the statuary?

you line up responses like unfired bullets in a magazine.

i am the driver. to cross. the bridge is a statue.

the troll has no reflection in the water below. if you dropped a coin or a small child you'd never hear it fall.

the troll disappears above as below.

the bridge keeps crossing.

and you hear a song guttering up from the welling confluence of spitting devils.

you answered all the questions. they're correct because you answered them.

it never occurs to you those questions were a test until the incline reverses directions and you're going down. to the ground. to get out. of the rain.

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what's the fearful foreboding nature of trolls? why are you supposed to be scared of them anyway? they'll eat you? oh. maybe. but more likely. more loyal to the myth a troll will turn you to stone. if you let it.

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the triboro bridge is long in the tooth

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i think the guy who was sitting there is still around. it's not like a bronze longfellow
rose from his chair to frolic on the docks.

but pan's left his place. bent his sculpted joints. extends his limbs til they turn to
marbled flesh. crumbles likeness to definite form.

could have been a fountain in a rustic garden.

he rises quietly leaving the right corners. this marble of clarity reclining.

he performs his frolic in the woods without a hitch. it's something he's done
before. pipe to lips.

he steals into the zoo. the elephant house. steadied by inexplicable. by the quiet
cover of night.

he makes off on the back of a pilfered elephant. with a curlyheaded girl.

into and

through this quiet land of night.

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Barnaby and Al a young lady and a gypsy woman

they're in Al's extended cab pickup. Barnaby is driving.
Al has a sixpack and a gypsy woman in the backseat.

the young lady is fiddling with the radio
Al and the gypsy woman are fixin that sixer

they met by the tractors. introductions ensued.
no one got stood up.

it's jill and rebecca if you're wondering
the young lady and the gypsy woman. respectively.

-i got me a sixpack in the cooler
-you're not driving
-the hell i'm not. it's my truck.
-i got the keys
-fuck

Al invites rebecca and six pounders of PBR into the backseat.
the truck has more doors than it knows what to do with.

Barnaby and jill take their places. Barnaby looks at the invitation
to review the driving directions.

-this should be fun
he hands the invite over to jill.
-you're in charge of this

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gypsy woman: historically we don't get along with anyone

Al: yeah? you seem purty nice

gypsy woman: looks can be deceiving

Al: i guess you'd know about that. wanna nother beer?

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-where the hell you goin? i knew i shoulda drove
-we're not even on the invitation yet
-i can see that. where you think you're goin?
-i know where i'm going. this is a shortcut
-christ. a shortcut. this is a long enough drive already. what about
that bridge down in the bottom?
-they just finished rebuilding it. old kirkland from down to the beacon
is the foreman and he told me it was done.
-that lyin bastard just told you that to make the county look good
-shut up and drink

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they too peruse winding byways. the scenic route or the back way.

Barnaby drives the roads like he's been driving them his whole life.
he has.

they hook up with the directions two turns in and only a short time later.

Barnaby: what's next?

young lady: what's next what?

Barnaby: on the directions

young lady: where are we?

Barnaby: waggoner ridge road

young lady: first comes 32. then highway X?

Barnaby: nothin like a highway

waggoner road is a cut of. reduces their travel by several miles
even though it's all gravel curves. 32 is a quick two lane road
with a speed limit that's too high. they drive five or six miles
and the young lady messes with the dial.

jill finds van morrison on the radio. the dj says it's him.
there is a pause and in starts moondance.

they turn left on highway X.

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gloves without fingers

the tiltowhirl operator wears these so he can smoke on the job.
it's too hot to wear full gloves. gauntlets are out of the question.
full gloves don't give fingertips enough air to see what they're
doing. so the gloves are trimmed. handtailored for dexterity.

wouldnt it be nice if it was never cold enough for fingers on
gloves. let alone mittens.

i guess one of the sacrifices for that is snowmen.

the tiltowhirl operator takes his gloves off when he's at the bar.
or otherwise away from the machinery and unsafe speeds.

the tiltowhirl operator senses the tender regret in the mouths
of the floozies when they come by the tiltowhirl the next day
expecting something and he tells her he cant ride the tiltowhirl.
he is the operator and he cannot operate the tiltowhirl
if he's on board.

as a matter of fact he's never ridden the tiltowhirl.

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Oscar's stomach tells him it's time to stop re-counting cows and head back to the house. else Marvin will moan about dinner being late for weeks.

Oscar's horse wades through the brush. Oscar has counted the cattle and checked each rump for the MO brand.

the first thing they did when Oscar arrived was round up all the stock and set in branding them.

they didn't brand the chickens.

Marvin showed Oscar how to build a brand. seems like there's not much Marvin can't do. he's tried his hand at most every practical trade Oscar can think of.

even showed Oscar how to make paper.

they designed the brand. by Marvin's suggestion a circle with an M in the middle. so it's MO, circle M or OM.

Oscar looks at a branded calf and reins his horse around toward the house.

as he approaches the compound Oscar sees the smoke. he figures Marvin has stoked up the cookfire so it'll be ready by the time Oscar arrives.

Oscar sees the sign of deer in the neighborhood. thinks he'll go out in the morning and try to shoot him one. good eatin and he's been wanting to try his hand at leatherwork.

there are buffalo not too far off. Marvin has talked about a little big game hunting. a couple full-grown buffalo could build you a house.

Oscar is hesitant.

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the girl with the curls likes to listen to pan and the orphan ply their tunes over pitchers of refreshments.

pan is teaching the orphan about the syrinx.

the girl is teaching them both about drinking. they didn't ask for instruction.

later, she thinks, she will show the orphan something about buttons and bobbins. there is no dusty Singer in the closet of this quiet land of night. so it's all needle and thread and a stitch in time saves nine.

patched trousers. replaced buttons. empty pitchers. lively instruments.

the orphan is an easy hand at learning any tune or instrument of music. he picks it up like a strong magnet picks up misplaced square headed nails and horseshoes from the straw and dirt littered floor of the stable.

they play any number of tunes about and for the act of drinking. pan and the orphan pass them back and forth across the table like the pitcher of mead. dribbling down their chins. in a curly beard. on the checkered tablecloth.

they have dispensed with goblets, mugs, cups, glasses and they drink straight from the pitcher. simpler means to an end.

the orphan or an adopting parent keeps the pitcher full until the curlyheaded girl walks behind the bar to the cask on the shelf and turns the hand carved wooden tap and waits and watches and wouldnt you know it she has a full pitcher in her hands and turns the tap closed and turns around and walks triumphant - vessel filled - back to the table she and these musical boys continue gargling guzzling melodies.

those adopting parental pals of the orphan's retire to the boudoir and they know this is their last period of rest with that boy under their roof. they are sad to see him go. they knew it would happen. they still have a way station to run. they are relieved.

the orphan would be on his way bright and early the next morning to cease his waiting. if there was morning in this quiet land of night. but he'll be leaving in any case and he's already stopped waiting. even if no one's told him he has. he's got music on his mind.

girl: if it's always night how do you know when to go to bed?
pan: when you're tired
orphan: when you're done shoeing the horse

the curlyheaded girl goes outside to look at something.

she wonders what color the dust at her feet is in full light. if you had a case of full light here would everything disappear?

she mills about. moves the handle of the screeching rusted metal pump. a rusty plume of water coughs out and falls into the bucket and the stream runs clean as she pumps. she fills the tin cup and drinks of the water and dust and night fully.

hangs the cup on its hook and she walks to the barn/stable.

there is a man-door to the left of the pair of tall sliding doors that are barred and bolted and closed until they are opened next.

she works the latch. a leather thong that snakes through a hole bored in the door and fastens to a small metal catch on the inside. it lifts and the door makes a sound.

she swings it open enough to enter.

there is a lantern inside. lit. she thinks of the elephant house.

the elephant walks over to her and sniffs her head and shirt. she puts her hands on the trunk in a loving fashion and hums something to the elephant.

it is an attempt at communication. not something you or i could necessarily understand. not something that could be written down.

it's like languid scat and the elephant digs.

these two are trading in emotion. their only common language.

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meanwhile.

pan and the orphan continue their music.

pan decides - since the kid asked and the girl's disappeared - he's going to teach the orphan to sew buttons.

pan produces a threaded needle and a shiny button from thin air. places it on the table and tells the orphan to find those troublesome trousers.

he's wearing them. they're his favorite pair. he only has two. he has a rope as a belt holding his buttonless pants up.

the orphan unties his belt. takes off his pants and lays them on the table.

pan and the orphan sit at the table.
neither wears pants.

pan provides the orphan a pipe like his own. pan motions with his notes for the orphan to follow him. they try tunes together. pan really does make a good teacher.

when someone teaches a manual act. something done with the hands. they wrap their guiding hands around the learning hands to import the motion of the act.

thus the hands of pan's music wrap the still-learning hands of the orphan's following tune and pan shows the orphan how to pick up the pieces without lifting a finger. by playing only notes.

and slowly. it takes a couple tries and they look like tandem snakecharmers. their pit viper, cobra, serpent has a needle for a head. a head that dips and dives and circles and follows with the music.

in the end the orphan gets the snake back in the basket and his trousers have buttons and they need to refill the pitcher.

the orphan never guessed learning all these instruments would make him a tailor.
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so the curlyheaded girl has certain tendencies that come to fore no matter what true or fictional world she's tromping through. mystical or not. she gets tired of people and all that has to be put up with and she walks away. or outside. and escapes.

finds lost.

she walks end to end in the stable in much the same fashion as the elephant. acquainting herself with each of the animals in the stalls. examining the wood. scuffing her feet. running her hand through the grain in the storage room at one end of the hall to feel those small seeds fall through her fingers.

she thinks of imprisonment.

in this quiet land of night it doesnt seem like any of these animals are acting imprisoned. there's no sense of being stuck. they're locked up for their own protection. or out of habit maybe.

they are patiently waiting.

she explores the abandoned phaeton at the opposite end of the hall. she crawls onto the dusty seat and imagines a pair of hardy horses chomping at the bit to make haste over the evening countryside.

she removes the whip from its station. feels its weight. keeps it quiet and replaces it.

she hops lively off the carriage. up a set of steps to the loft. she climbs among the stored hay. reaches a peak and jumps some several feet to a waiting soft landing pad of loose hay below. missing the upright pitchfork by five or six feet.

rinse and repeat as needed.

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she looks at the rough wood of the rafters. feels the rough and incurs the wrath of a small splinter. she pulls the offending wood out her skin and sucks on the wound til blood comes and she tastes rust and she wipes her finger on a smooth board and looks at the small dark stain.

downstairs again she paces the length of the stable. stall to stall to stall. with the elephant.

she is tired. she doesnt want to get stepped on due to her own carelessness. plus the elephant would feel bad.

so back to the phaeton. (no, not futon) she's in the driver's seat imagining the rattle of wheels and squeak of springs and she falls asleep.

the elephant drapes a saddle blanket on the curlyheaded girl.

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pa- what're we gonna do with that boy?

ma- now you know right well we're not going to do anything with him. we knew
when this started he'd be leaving soon enough

pa- i guess i just forgot. or quit remembrin

ma- well. it's plain to see it's time for him to go

pa- we'll sure miss him

ma- we sure will

pa- at least we got to help him. and he aint entirely an orphan after all

ma- he'll always be an orphan. but he's our orphan

pa- you think we'll ever see him again?

ma- no

pa- guess he can fend for hisself

ma- guess so

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there's a dark flame of circumstance that lives in the lantern. dances as the
shadow of light.

(coincidence, consequence)

there's a price for his leaving. ma and pa had to give a lot more'n they expected.
they would have given more. all in all little is lost. just a structure. and a boychild
left on the stoop is free to follow a path.

a flame or spark of idea or cognition or recognition or hint.

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the re-telling

sometimes a chapter or a page gets misplaced and it has to be told again.
this is one of those instances.

to the best of my recollection there's a dark flame of consequence doing a tango
in the light of the lantern.

also. and this i can be certain of. there's a girl with curls what abandons song and
dance and music and drink and sets about milling around outside the way
station. to see if it was still this quiet land of night.

she screeches the pump handle and scuffs the dust.

then to the stable to visit her patiently pacing friend. the elephant.

the curlyheaded girl walks through the man-door. and she's inside. there are
animals. any number of them. any number greater than a handful.

roll. roll. roll in zee hay.

she jumps as if from on high. down. down to the soft sea of trimmed grasses.
it's daylight when you're dreaming in this quiet land of night.

soon enough she's tired. been traveling. as if on high. on the majestic back of an
elephant. as if she's hannibal crossing the alps. as if she's a bareback rider what
misplaced her horse and has to make do with the galumphing form of an
elephant.

in tiredness. after the meet and greet with any number of animals. she sits on the
seat of the phaeton. like the sun king disappearing from his chamber pot she
disappears to sleep.

the elephant drapes a saddle blanket over her.

the tango. a south american dance somehow this dark spark has picked up along
the way. there are quiet hums from the music being played inside the way
station.

and as is often the case with an unbridled tango this flame of coincidence begins
to get carried away. and yes. you said it. the flame has left the dance floor of the
coal-oil lantern. hopped right off and it's dancing its way through the air. across
the floor. leaves a trail of ignition behind. more to come. ignition ahead.

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things you find in a barn:

- hay
- dirt
- dust
- grain
- leather tack for beasts of burden
- tools
- hinges and whatnot laying about
- clutter
- hay
- straw
- shit
- animals
- a lantern
- stalls
- disused equipment. for instance. a phaeton
- birds in the rafters
- mice, rats. rodentia
- footprints
- horseshoes
- pitchfork
- an owl maybe in search of rodents
- lumber
- tines
- time
- buckets
- a curlyheaded girl (asleep)

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things you should not find in a barn:

-weasel (or is that the henhouse?)

-fire

-fish

-a sales counter

-typewriters

-lingerie

-vishnu

-subway conductors

-fire

-portugese manowar

-injuns

-anyone named snopes

-bridges

-debutantes

-a buick made after 1972

-fire

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the elephant's on top of things. the spark flies. the fire begins. the elephant's pacing and sees it happen. the elephant rises to the occasion. slips automatically into action. and she's waking the girl and her curls. the elephant lets out a trumpet. all the animals in the stalls are nervous. the girl gets up. awake. wide awake.

curlyheadedgirl: damn. is that smoke? kaff kaff kaff

elephant: kaff kaff kaff [loud elephant trumpeting sound]

the girl looks around. at the front where the official doors are there's serious conflagration barring entrance or egress. no suckers for pt barnum. and this long hall with stalls lining either side leads the girl to believe. (and it's true. it is.) there is a door behind this rusty phaeton. she points the existence of a doorway out to the elephant. the elephant knows what to do. hell. what else are you going to do when the timber's burning down around you. bash something down. the first to go is the phaeton. poor carriage demolished by one heedless elephant set on escape and safety. next is the twin set of sliding doors at this far and dark end of the barn. and the fire's moving quick like a burning bush. engulfing. and as the elephant's bashing the girl's run to the fiery end of the hall and begun springing latches and swinging open doors so all the animals can get out.

the elephant bashes down this pair of doors. and she's outside. she turns around. lets out a trumpet of alarm and charges back into the fray. and inside as the smoke moves and the fire's already eating the first set of stables and the girl's making progress freeing the animals. but it aint so fast. so the elephant takes to a little more demolition. doing the fire's job before it can get to it. the elephant starts knocking down the doors of the stalls. this is some fucking elephant. these so recently saved beasts are thankful and get the hell out of there.

the girl opens the last unbashed stall and the elephant's done bashing and the animals sneak out and the elephant picks that girl up like she's a log or a rag doll and haste makes no waste and they're outside.

(upstairs in the loft of loose and fragrant hay. as the fire licks its way up the steps from below a raccoon flees the scene with her couple youngsters. the barn owl watches. flies outside to the nearest tree and waits for something on its menu to flee the flames. braised mouse. or another dainty treat.)

safety.

respite.

clear air.

kaff kaff kaff.

they sound the alarm. but there's no saving the barn.

some of the animals mill about. some wander off into the wilds of this quiet land of night. they are all thankful. they are all alive.

pan plays a song of safety and healing.

and pan and the orphan and ma and pa and the other boarders. everyone watches the burning building. the end of a structure. formless fire prevails. nothing to be done. the new structure of conflagration. heat and light and smoke.

they watch the dance of the dark flame of circumstance parading as the shadows of light. marauding the former animal home. and hay.

and suddenly everyone's standing around watching a barn burn like it's the predictable end of a faulkner story.

who set the fire anyway?

it was the lantern done it.

¢

-well shit. what happens next? says one of the other boarders at the way station.

the boarders come to realise. as the fire's intensity wanes. they better get to finding their mounts. even if it is a damn ostrich. when that's what's going your way you gotta take it.

pan comforts the girl and the elephant. plays his pipe. they are all a bit shaken up. but alive and hale. the elephant meanders off to a nearby stream to bathe in the mud. she's feeling a little singed around the ears. but all in all she'll be traveling soon.

the orphan hops on a horse and helps round up lost mounts for the guests.

pa- nothin to be done

ma- nope

pa- too bad. i kinda liked that barn

ma- time for somethin new

pa- hell. we could have a big barn raisin

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the orphan's adopting mother heads inside to worry about a meal. after something like this there's nothing better to do than have a good feed.

the curlyheaded girl sits with pan as he plays his pipe. she hums.

the guests singly swing by to give her thanks for getting the poor beasts out that fire. she says to thank the elephant.

the barn is a big fire of light and warmth and comfort as pan and the girl relax and wait for the meal.

-you fell asleep?

-yes. on that buggy

-reminds me of a friend of mine.

-the buggy?

-nevermind. you shouldnt be sleeping when there's a lantern like that around

-i guess you're right. i hadnt planned on sleeping

-not the first time i guess

-no

-once a fire catches in a building like that there's nothing to do but get everything out and hope no one's hurt

-that seems to be what happened

-yes. it was ideal

-where's the elephant?

-she went to the stream.

-is she alright?

-fine i think. we'll play her some music after dinner

-what else?

-what?

-what else?

-oh. that boy's going with us

-the orphan?

-yes

-good. he needs to get out of here

-cost him a barn to leave

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in this quiet land of night pan and orphan and curlyheaded girl ride atop the elephant.

behind they've left the cinders of a burnt barn at the way station for ma and pa to contend with. the orphan is sent off with adoptive blessings and wished well. the orphan has a stick with a bundle at the far end. it is no carrot for this elephant. high on the summit of motoring elephant flesh they eat a light snack prepared by ma.

the curlyheaded girl looks back at the landscape they've already trod. as she looks she sees a small cloud of moving dust like a dervish.

the elephant continues.

pan plays a song of what's already happening.

-did you ever go to portugal?
-once. it's a weedy place
-when i was there i never saw the seashore
-that's in brazil
-but the coffee was good

the girl with the curls watches the dervish in the past of their path grow larger with nearness.

curlyheadedgirl: your ma sure makes fine biscuits
orphan: she's proud of her cooking
curlyheadedgirl: i want to swim
pan: there's a swimming hole where we're going
orphan: and music

the dustcloud is closer still and gains.

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they continue. spread molasses and butter on biscuit halves.

this fledgling orphan. found his way. spreads his molasses on ma's biscuit halves by way of the music from his flute. doesnt need a butterknife.

curlyheadedgirl: what's to drink?
orphan: here's a waterskin
pan: and mead!
curlyheadedgirl: let's have some mead

she drinks and laughs. pan and the orphan play a little ditty and pass the mead.

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by now, as the girl with the curls looks that way the supposed dervish is very close. it is apparent that it is a single rider likely on horseback. riding all-out.

there is a shrill bugle call from nowhere.

not an instrument pan or the orphan tote. must be the elephant.

there is another call: charge!

and a few errant pistol shots.

the horseback rider reaches and passes the elephant. heads them off at the pass. cuts them off. as much as a man on a horse can get in the way of an intent elephant.

the elephant does not trample horse and rider. she stops.

as the dust settles the man on the horse is revealed.
it's our dear teddy.

curlyheadedgirl: what's the rush?

TR: i've just led the charge up san juan hill

curlyheadedgirl: again?

the elephant and Algonquin fall into step naturally as the conversation continues.

TR: some steps that elephant takes

pan: yes. we move right along

they move at an easy even gait despite the elephant's giant steps.

curlyheadedgirl: where ya headed?

the girl with the curls has ceased disbelief and is actually rather happy to see ole teddy cantering along beside them. it's not often you get to meet one of the guys from mount rushmore.

and teddy's in a pretty good mood as he's just charged a hill and been galloping across this quiet land of night.

TR: to see a friend about some pigeons

(setting some pigeons on fire)

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pan: doing any hunting?

TR: not in the last few days

pan: this would be a good place [as he looks around]

orphan: if you were hungry. you'd find something

curlyheadedgirl: you can hunt here?

pan: survival. not sport

TR: this is no place for trophies

curlyheadedgirl: you going our way?

TR: more than likely. but i need to stop on the way to meet my friend.

the curlyheaded girl wants to invite him up on the elephant for tea.
but this teddy is busy with his warpath. on his way.

they say their goodbyes and promise to re-kindle this ember upcoming.

that dervish called a man on a horse whirls off into dust.
disappearing for the time being.

and the elephantine riders are left to their own devices as the only riders on this
road. in sight.

the elephant continues.

as they all continue. riding along. ferried by this mountain of grey flesh. no sign of
snow.

in this quiet land of night. pan, orphan, curlyheaded girl and elephant are a song
of motion. called transit. in this quiet land of night.

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spacious. like certainty
or a learned response

a field, a valley, hills, a stream
trees, bonfires, convergence
celebratory

of no measured or definite event, human, hero, martyr

a party in the woods.

gathered around fires
music, dance, food, drink, other drugs, no drugs
in shadows- trees, greenery, encampments, provisions
in the shadows- dark at heart - sex & laughter & more music.
& glimmered lights called the source of smoke.

various concoctions in cauldrons and coolers.

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upon arrival an area to park your car.
if that's the direction you came from.
a path with a small sign: Party.
faintly, through the woods, in the tops
of the trees a glow indicates gathering.
& to get there. just before the path ends.
a bridge over the branch. stream, brook,
creek, fleuve, amazon, lethe.

wooden

& wide planked covered bridge large enough
for a truck the path there would never hold.

lit at four corners. by
lanterns. coal-oil orange white lays out
the grain of the wooden bridge.

the fish in the branch are watching.
downstream a man in waders is
meditating in the middle of the water.
the fishing line is fluorescent neon
tessellation that casts an eerie glow
on the fisherman's motion & hat.

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covered bridge. like a barn
over water. rectangular. planked.
a pair of large tall wooden doors.
closed. a plank as a wooden
bar to keep them shut. this
bar has to be lifted. when this
bar is lifted and the doors pushed
wide. then may the passengers
proceed.

and certainly any covered bridge
in what is unmistakably night
is dark and creepy within. there's
a small window on one side. the
lanterns cast only a quarter moon's
glow. the floorboards let you
know you're walking.

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in this quiet land of night

there is no elephant parking. there is a stone bridge. the elephant crosses. the curlyheaded girl, the orphan and pan play a song that arrives at a destination. the elephant agrees.

this stone bridge lit more ethereally. torches the length of the bridge. aflame. lit. and there's a faint light coming from somewhere else. adds definition to the stone features. maybe it's the rocks glowing.

on the bridge sits a young man playing a harp and singing a soft song. thankfully insufficiently clad. nude but for the longbow and quiver of arrows on his shoulder.

his song changes to greeting and welcome as the elephant approaches. he greets pan and his companions. the elephant lets loose a bugle. the bridge-farers are lit in their laughter.

across the bridge night becomes evening and dark forest reveals bonfires and the sound of jubilation. a party. fraternization.

in the stream. water adorns the stones. the current recalls crossing.

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they get closer. the orphan gets excited. he hears the music. from every direction. any number of tunes. co-existing. interacting and conveying the hold the party has on participants.

they near the main clearing. to one side the mounts, steed, conveyances are loosely collected and corresponding. parking for precious beasts and oxcarts.

pan sees old friends.

the elephant stops and kneels. pan, the curlyheaded girl and the orphan dismount. abandon ship. pan grabs a parcel.

he opens it and materializes a dancing skirt for the girl and a tuxedo for himself. no pants.

the elephant is about to experience a reunion.

the elephant knows nothing about buttons. the elephant knows how to cry.

the orphan scurries off to the loudest group of musicians.

pan plays thanks to the elephant. the curlyheaded girl has her hands on the elephant's trunk and hums along. the riding platform disappears. the elephant rises from her knees.

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from somewhere in the dark
collection of conveyances
sounds another call.
the elephant responds.
there is another elephant.

the two mammoth forms of grey
move together. attract by way of physics
& draw close.

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this is her reunion
and hers

now we've got two elephants

it's not that they both happen to be elephants
that they're so set on reunion

it goes back aways
not as far as genetic code
but far enough

these two elephants are friends
longtime acquaintances

they grew up together
the same pickets & fences
childhood chums

back at the circus
they performed together
& lived elephant's captive lives
together

this is where we see elephants cry

they come in contact
at last the physical
touch

there are tears
elephantine embrace
tangled trunks and grey

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not often you get to see such happy elephants

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-they were together once in a circus

-right. she came to the zoo from that circus. the final liquidation of their assets.
salvation for an elephant

-they were split up

-elephants never forget

-is that salvation?

pan and the girl with the curls. arm in arm. dance their way to the nearest bonfire.
they are thirsty after the elephant tears.

the elephants re-unite.

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on the other hand Barnaby has the opportunity to put Al's 4X4 to the test of an unkempt path that barely qualifies as a road.

there are ruts and holes and puddles. it is a bumpy ride. but to a purpose. and the truck handles it quite nicely thank you.

Al is too busy in the back drinking and wooing and employing his charm to notice the rough road. but he does wonder about the extra motion. but in passing and only when it's not happening.

the gypsy woman is friendly and becoming drunk.

the young lady in the front seat has dropped the invitation in the glovebox and opened the bottle she brought. the boons of hard liquor on a road that isnt legally a road and Barnaby isnt legally driving. and they pass the bottle back and forth across the seat and the young lady scoots closer to the center of the cab. closer to Barnaby. to pass him the bottle. so she can reach.

as Barnaby drives the pickup through this proving ground of a dirt road they come across a log perpendicular to their purpose, to the road. there is no way to get by it.

Barnaby and Al get out of the truck to examine the log. Al is mumbling curses. Barnaby is slightly perplexed. Al kicks the log. as if to see how mobile the log is. it hurts.

-ouch. git the chainsaw boy
-alright

Barnaby walks to the side of the pickup. smiles at the two women in the truck. reaches into the bed of the pickup and extracts one chainsaw.

Barnaby checks the gas. Al keeps it full. Barnaby walks over and puts the chainsaw on the ground near the offending log. the chainsaw starts on the third tug with a little choke. Barnaby raises his voice to Al.

-you get the chain while i start in cuttin through this bad boy

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we're talking about a log that's three feet in diameter.

the only way to get where they're going is to go through it. cleave the devil in two and go between the pieces. the only other option requires backing up a quarter of a mile as there's not room to turn around on this tiny dirt road.

when they see this is going to take a while the gypsy woman and the young lady get out of the truck.

the chainsaw produces a thick blue smoke as Barnaby pursues bisecting the log. the chainsaw is not quiet and it's kicking up a lot of sawdust.

young lady: this is interesting
gypsy woman: men at work
young lady: is this the right road?
gypsy woman: yes. aren't you the one with the directions?

Al retrieves the large towchain from the tool box in the back of the truck. he lugs it to the vicinity of the front bumper and drops it heavily and clanking to the ground.

then he takes one end with its forged hook and fastens it to the sturdy bumper. whereupon he grabs the other end and drags it toward where Barnaby is sawing logs.

-hitch it up to this end yonder (Barnaby loudly)
-you think that's best?
-this side seems most mobile
-you want me to saw some?

Barnaby stops sawing and cuts the motor to let the saw cool. he wipes the sweat from his face with a handkerchief.

Barnaby and Al anchor the chain to the log.

-a little more'n a third of the way through
-we gonna need more gas?
-maybe a little bar oil too
-i'll get it from the truck

Barnaby checks the chain out as Al retrieves the oil and gas. they fix the saw all up. tighten the chain and Al takes to sawing a while.

Barnaby excuses himself to jaw with the ladies.

young lady: how much longer?
Barnaby: not too long now
gypsy woman: how is it going?
Barnaby: goin pretty good. soon as we cut through all we gotta do is back
up and drag 'at bastard out the way
young lady: did it fall across the road?
Barnaby: looks that way
Al: [from far off. over yonder] c'mere boy

Barnaby excuses himself to saw with the log.

-think it's bout your turn?
-guess so. how goes it?
-goin alright. you should get through. i'm gonna get some beer
-we'll need it

Barnaby restarts the saw on one tug and continues to the end of the log. gets Al to drive a wedge so the saw won't get stuck. Barnaby saws through. extracts the saw. they put the tools back in the truck. Al stands to watch the log. Barnaby hops in the truck and starts the engine. the gypsy woman and the young lady step to the side of the road to witness the proceedings.

Barnaby puts the truck in reverse and pulls the chain taut. he keeps going and the large log moves slowly. Al barks directions Barnaby mostly ignores. he drags the log to one side so it's enough out of the way to get past with the truck.

he pulls up enough to put some slack in the chain and gets out of the truck. turns it off. Barnaby and Al gather the chain. release its hold on wood and metal. and return it to the truck.

they stand to inspect their results.

the young lady holds the six pack by one of its free rings. it holds three chilly beers. Barnaby and Al each pound one pounder and split the third.

young lady: now let's see if we can get where we're going

lucky for them there was a sixpack and a half in Al's cooler. they all get into the truck and drive on.

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yes yes there are drums

a circle. a campfire. other instruments. refreshments. spits over coals. skewered meat.

you could call it any number of kinds of gatherings. there are similar sorts of parties. you would be incorrect. but barely.

it is those kinds of celebrations and a few others and more.

around the fire the curlyheaded girl and pan chose: instruments and a hot vat of mead or a similar sweet alcoholic concoction. and the people know pan and technically he is a co-host. he cyclically greets those lit by the flames and thanks them for coming. he'll be performing a version of this the whole night if he's not careful. co-host in formal attire. a formal attitude and someone, a young lady, provides a daisy for his lapel.

and pan introduces the curlyheaded girl to people whose names she will forget. she's not up for a pop quiz. the daisy toting young woman compliments the curlyheaded girl's skirt.

-thanks. it was a gift

-it's a skirt like a dance

-i'm told that's what it's for

pan scampers off after a willing nymph.

-have a daisy

-thank you

the curlyheaded girl sits herself down on the top of a large rock.
for the duration of her first drink.
to fortify herself for the upcoming.

she will dance and follow the frolic and sing for the trees.

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they are dealt a cable car

there is a crowd of small hecklers. they run a spotlight that tracks the progress of the gondola. and they yell insults at passengers.

it's a long way down. there's a gorge. ravine. not exceptional in size. but being dashed upon those rocks below would not be pleasant.

Barnaby parks the automobile and pockets the change. keys.

they pile out too many doors to the soft earth. each shoe makes its print. leaves break. twigs crumble. under foot.

Al crunches the last PBR can in his hand. empty. drops it in the bed of the pickup. it jangles like a quarter in a vending machine falling to the coin return slot in defeat.

the gypsy woman sighs slightly. farewell tincan.

jill passes the bottle around. Al swigs. rebecca drinks. Barnaby savors and returns the bottle to jill politely.

a small heckler rushes at Al to insult him one on one. Al kicks the assailant in the head. this small guy crumbles to the unconscious ground.

-fucking leprechauns
-are you finished?

(the hecklers laugh at their fallen comrade. unfortunate associate. every man for himself)

the leprechauns scatter. battle stations. they situate themselves to avail the best possible vantages to insult the passengers of the cable car.

-yeah. you think this contraption works?
-can't be any worse than the tiltowhirl
-after you ladies

they walk to the cable car which has just returned from a successful crossing. Barnaby holds the door of the cable car open. Al gestures their entry.

the two men climb aboard. inside there is a rope to be pulled. they all lend a hand. girls and boys.

Al flings insults back at the hecklers.

-i'll tickle your nose with your genitals as you lay crushed against the rocks
bloody and paralyzed
-there's nothing you can do
-there's no way you'll make it
-won't you lick my lollipop little girl

the gypsy woman slings arrows of her own. in a language of her own. one of the
leprechauns understands her words. turns pale and faints at the precariously
high level of offense.

the spotlights play and pierce the windows of the conveyance.

these hecklers are the intentionally uninvited
their presence was actively requested to be absent
they are a little bitter, but it's not like they're ever invited anyhow
these little people are here to make a little trouble
these little people are cowards

the pulleys squeal as the rope creaks and moves the party of four forward. out
across the chasm and water and to the other side. to get to the other side.

it takes a few minutes only and they hop back to the soft ground to a path toward
light and sound. party. the sign says so.

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they read the end of longfox road
and sure enough it's a cul de sac
place to park your car

they dismount their trusty steed

in the dark

the statue stands away
from the buick

in the dark

the driver looks across

the quiet glade at her

they're both stopped in their tracks
held up progress for observance

in the dark

the statue is taken in by the trees and the nominal stones
at her feet that never asked to be sculpture

the driver is taken in by the statue

finally there is an imperceptible change

like the air pressure shifted

or the atmosphere adjusted itself

to the presence of the statue

like the trees acknowledged her stance

and the slight breeze changed

directions to better reveal her beauty

the beautiful woman called a statue

lingers

her hands are caressed by the wind

and her hair shifts with the air

this inalterable lady stands clearly tall

the driver cant do anything

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monuments to warriors an interlude

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past the natural history museum. teddy roosevelt's bronze horse snorts at the indian with a hand on the halter as the horse shakes his withers and tails an imaginary fly. TR's pistol is primed for a crossdraw charge into central park or up st. nicholas hill where he reenacted san juan and other hills as governor. one liners rattle his sabre.

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off he goes. dear old teddy. good to the last drop. on his trusty steed. algonquin.

(do you want to dispute my facts?)

up eighth avenue. central park west. in and out of the wilds of the park. zigzag northward progress.

TR keeps going north of the park on eighth avenue. frederick douglass this far north. til he turns and follows st nicholas northwest until there's a hill and grass and what almost qualifies as woodlands. st nick park. st nicholas hill. an oasis of upper manhattan. on top of the hill are the neogothic structures of ccny. an obvious target for any man charging that hill.

suddenly our re-creation (teddy and horse. bronze) is re-creating san juan.

he jumps a small fence. finds a path and gallops up the hill.

rumor has it there's voodoo in them woods. someone from somewhere goes there to perform ritual sacrifice and other rites. they leave the fresh corpses of things like chickens and lambs in the light for everybody and adam to see.

boy is he excited. this teddy on his horse. to gallop and move. making mud underfoot. demolishing the meaning of grass. to get in the way of the dirt floor. carpet.

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meanwhile. in washington square. charles atlas has reared his perfectly formed head. or is it george washington? he's the guy the park and arch are named for after all.

charles atlas says his physique was inspired by a statue of hercules in a museum. george washington says charles atlas modeled for this statue.

the father of our country is modeled after an american strongman. an italian immigrant. the original 97 pound weakling.

there are two statues of washington on the arch. one is all folds and flowing cloak. the other is a stance of liberty. prepared to defend and construct.

the entire arch is surrounded by a chain link fence. statues and all. surely the way stanford white intended it. fifth avenue used to run straight through the park and arch.

of the two statues we're talking about the one on the right as you face south. the one with the stance. the one with the stain on his crotch as a mark of time. it is large and longlived like the stains on the pants of the bums who pass out on the benches in the park.

washington's doublet is attractive. makes me wish i had one. or that anyone wore the damn things anymore.

washington and atlas agree to take a stroll. now there's a promenade in the square. used to be fifth avenue went through the arch. like minetta brook before. they circle the fountain that now takes center stage in the park as something that resembles flow or motion at that precise location.

who do they run into but giuseppe garibaldi. he's drawing his sword.

charles atlas is from italy. george washington qualifies as a forefather.

garibaldi is the father of guerilla warfare. a brilliant tactician. i wonder if he could do math or play chess. the sculptor of garibaldi was in garibaldi's regiment. so garibaldi modeled for his own statue. italian democracy is garibaldi's fault.

mail order fitness is atlas' game. but he had help. i guess they all did. help and sculptors too.

george washington slept here says the facetious plaque on one of the park benches.

there are greetings and introductions between the two statues. there is no language barrier. all statues talk the same. they have a lot in common.

well george washington and giuseppe garibaldi decide to play frisbee.

is that a good idea? plenty of people play frisbee in the park.

charles atlas is all for it. as a chance to showcase his prowess. which prowess? any prowess and every prowess. he is a burgeoning cornucopia of prowess. he is charles atlas.

he towed a foundering rowboat ashore. passengers and all. with his teeth. or rope. he was swimming. the rowboat was swamped. there was a storm. he was a hero. and charles atlas.

he once pulled a locomotive with a rope. by his lonesome.

neither garibaldi nor washington have played frisbee. or even seen one.

charles atlas throws the balance. like a discus. it would be hard for a man like him to avoid the frisbee.

garibaldi resists the urge to slice the frisbee in the air with his sword.

washington has his own prowess. crossing rivers. it's in a picture. and cherry trees. something curious about wooden teeth.

garibaldi has a beard like castro. the hat is also similar. (the hat maybe castro wishes he had.) but i suppose it's the other way around. garibaldi came first. castro is just a copycat.

atlas explains washington and garibaldi's idea to them. they have a right to know how to play the game.

they ignore atlas and start tossing the frisbee. it only takes a few tosses to get the principle of the thing. a small plastic flying saucer zips from palm to palm through the dark quiet of the park.

it glows.

in a tree a plastic shopping bag has become tangled in the branches and flips and crinkles for the wind.

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neither washington nor garibaldi have any idea how to keep score in a game of frisbee.

it's like catch. a re-invention of the american pastime.

charles atlas has no idea how to do anything but win.

washington as president, accompanied by wisdom and justice. this statue of george washington modeled after charles atlas.

(before he was named the most perfectly formed man at madison square garden in 1922. a title that was never awarded again because atlas won it and there was no more competition.)

sculpted by alexander calder. this is no giant pair of scissors.

calder and atlas got together in calder's studio:

-glad you could drop by chuck. you see i have this commission

-is always a pleasure alexander

-how do you feel about george washington, chuck?

-he is hero for any man

-i'm glad you think so. now i need you to be a hero for any man

-you sign the paychecks

the rest, as they say, is marble.

the wind nuzzles and ruffles through garibaldi's beard as he reaches gracefully for washington's most recent throw.

-i like this game general. you americans know how to have a good time

garibaldi lived on staten island in the 19th century.

possibly in the same house thoreau occupied.

obviously not at the same time.

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lady victory stands tall on a twenty foot granite plinth in monument square. it says something on the plinth about brave men dead in winning. she has weapons, a shield, armor, a helmet and a fine imposing figure cast in bronze.

a man walks across the cobbled square with a friend. she is carrying a minolta. someone they might've met before waves at them from a bench. they both wave back. after a few steps they stop and look up at lady victory.

the man says: i think we could live in that helmet

he digs around in his pocket and withdraws a fresh package of Samson he bought at the smoke shop a couple blocks back. he tears the plastic and california cancer warning off the blue package and smooths a paper he fills with moist, fresh tobacco. the man hands pouch and papers to his friend. she smiles.

-thanks

-you're welcome

-i think she should run for mayor

-yeah? you think she'd win?

-i'd vote for her. she has an honest face

-& a big sword

-yes, i think she'd win

-you should tell her that. it'd probably make her feel good knowing she has the support of her constituents and she might let us live in her helmet.

-hey lady victory! beautiful lady! you should run for mayor! we'll vote for you! this town needs a change!

-if that didn't convince her i don't know what will

-maybe she'll give us a call. we can work on her campaign

the man isn't sure. he can't be. but it seemed like, when his friend was yelling, lady victory cocked her head a little to one side and looked down at the two of them.

the girl hands the tobacco back. she has rolled a cigarette. the man puts the tobacco in one pocket and digs in another and extracts a royal blue Bic. he lights the girl's cigarette first. then his own. they both take a refreshing drag from their cigarettes and look up at lady victory's stoic self. they continue their walk across the cobbled square.

they cross the street, pass a u-haul and turn down a sidestreet smoking their cigarettes.

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not a beamer. not a skateboard. not a forklift. the buick is a buick. internal combustion. unleaded. no propane. no foot power. no diesel.

the buick contains circles and completion. completes them.

driving circles with a statue in a buick. the driver is in control. the statue called a beautiful woman is the navigator. not that she especially knows where they are. where they are going. or any where. but she has the directions and speaks them aloud for driver and buick to hear.

the statue has to chart a course and adapt to the fact that maps never match nighttime.

they coast down hills. the driver guns it for switchbacks and uphill. he patiently conforms to the paths roads blaze. switchback travel attains the highest wagon wheels on the plains. fashioned from woven grasses.

the statue is considerably more delicate than wrought iron or other material. she names things she doesnt remember ever seeing. it makes sense to her she should recognise them by name.

the goldfish is not murdered or bellyup. the plastic bag is twisted and sealed at the top. inflated 2/3 full of air. 1/3 water. some negligible fraction taken up with fish.

still the water is clear. the bag is clean. the goldfish is jostled and confused. on the seat between statue and driver.

excuse me says the goldfish. but is this where i belong?

the statue and driver do not hear the goldfish. the buick is indifferent. the prizes in the back seat are stuffed.

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bridges are nested after sunset. lit by a porous storm of prisoners, polkadots, islands and motorists. there is a fog made by the rain as it bastes the rock of tarred and tethered pavement. it cooks the last tender meat.

outside is a dark bitter broth that moves to unmapped places. feeds no upturned mouth and slakes no thirst.

the final thread of cadenced bridgecrossing chimes the same tone as moon and light and dark and accoutrements. the corporeal storm sedates all modes of transportation. dampens the spiritual offspring of masonry patterns.

cars, pedestrians, cyclists and pets move from shore to shore in confusion and certainty.

orchestrated incidental music of nature by way of civilisation. turns itself to the same song that wells and gutters and wafts and waves up and out of the water below.

bridges are for crossing.

¢

you shiver by the force of the wind. the wind-shifted sound. the lines of light. the towers. the water. there's always tomorrow and the view.

tonight: counting. bridges. elaborate cornerstones.

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news of the west

at least 7 dead in fiery train explosion.
as the train approached the bridge the locomotive was overturned
and the bridge collapsed in snowy northern somewhere.
serge dahlen, a passenger on board the train,
said there was no warning.

'the explosion came like lightning from a clear sky'

there was no indication of what may have caused the accident.
heavy black smoke billowed from behind tall evergreens
over the snowcovered landscape
as at least two of the train's cars burned.

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their first operation does not go off quite as planned.

it is successful. there was an explosion. things were broken.

it is unsuccessful. nowhere in their plan did they intend to explode a locomotive. they haven't sworn it off or anything. hell it's even pretty to look at.

and to top it all off. their first operation is a complete failure because the railroad is convinced it is the locomotive exploding that demolishes the bridge. the railroad thinks that is the easy explanation.

the charge intended to explode the bridge goes off just as the locomotive reaches the bridge. the locomotive and coal car plummet into the gully formerly spanned by the now-exploded defunct bridge. several other cars of the train are derailed. turned over and caught fire. only a few passengers are injured. most are well-shaken.

the engineer and his mates with the shovels are killed. if not by the explosion then by the fall. or some combination of the two.

bridges are for crossing.

¢

our friends, Oscar and the lieutenant, are near a railroad bridge. they are rigging the explosives to be detonated in hopes of obliterating this particular railroad bridge.

they're finishing up. having a smoke. attaching the wires to the detonator. it resembles a churn in action.

they hear a train approach. it's behind schedule. moving along slowly in anticipation of the upcoming bridge. the engineers have instructions to go slow across these bridges for their shoddy construction.

the train slowly approaches with its sound. an entire rhythm section on rails. orchestrated incidental music of nature by way of civilization.

they're sitting. talking. smoking. hidden in some underbrush to avoid detection most effectively.

we won't go into which one it is does it. whose idea it is. if it is one or both that makes it happen. that wouldn't be fair. the train arrives. thrumming earthborne rhythm. clanks and hisses and progress over rails. steam and smoke and iron.

someone watches. quietly. patiently. his hand rests on the plunger. at the ready. as what he sees aligns just right he plunges the plunger. detonates the explosion that claims bridge and locomotive. it's a big boom. debris flying. out of nowhere there's no more bridge. no more locomotive. just remains snake of a train with its head fell off into a ravine. smoking and licking at the flames.

they remember what number to count down from in the perfect timing of burnt bridges.

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so their first operation. their first attack. is ruled to be an accident. turned out to be an accident. accidentally.

somehow that makes them innocent.

next time they don't want an accident. they want their actions to be seen for what they are. an attack.

at least they've found something to occupy their time and they're not sitting around all day complaining about something they'll never do anything about.

-we'll burn that bridge when we come to it.

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¢

the doublebit slides through the bark like a hand through empty pockets.

Marvin is cutting down a few trees. some for firewood. you can never have too much.
other trees for lumber. for construction. he's going to build a new chicken coop. the old
one is the oldest structure on the spread. rotted and falling to splinters. and it's not big
enough anyway. it's easier to build a new one than rebuild the old one.

he thwacks away with the axe. felling trees and mentally designating their fate.

one for the chickens. one for me.
one to give em a home. one to cook em.
one for a rafter. one for kindling.

thwack!

damp fragrant chips of tree flesh fly and fall with each swing of the axe
thwack
the doublebit slides through the bark like a hand through empty pockets
thwack
logs. timber. lumber. cordwood.
thwack

-timber!

there are pops and shudders and rumbles and the right angle of an erect conifer calls itself
acute and shrinks and falls and the tree hits the ground. horizontal.

¢

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for their next death-defying feat they'll blow something else up. oh dynamite. ferocious friend. fishkiller. nitroglycerine twigs.

times are they feel pangs of conscience. one or the other of them. or both. so they fall a tree across the tracks. or tear up some rails and drag them off the roadbed. to keep another locomotive from toppling off another recently exploded bridge. to spare innocent passengers. though nothing is harder on the railroad than the public relations disaster of croaked passengers. truly freight pays the bills and produces profit. also truly any money coming in is profit in this land of government subsidy.

Oscar and the lieutenant ride their horses across open rangeland. they lead a pack mule. the mule is toting the dynamite and other related paraphernalia. they'll be close to the next bridge by sundown. by the cover of darkness they'll plant the explosives. if they have a run-in with john law they'll shoot him.

they find a primo spot for an overnight camp. among large rocks at the base of a hill. there is an old firepit where they tease underbrush to burning and make some coffee and other ranchhand victuals.

-so how is it back east?

-when i left it was going along just fine. industrialism and all that

-here we are in the west. we are (this is) manifest destiny

-somebody was silly enough to hand manifest destiny a couple crates of dynamite

-we should raid the army supply wagons to replenish the explosive coffers

-what's the army need with dynamite?

-no telling. but they've got plenty of it

-i guess they're into blowing shit up

-that's pretty common here in the west

-there's so much of it. what else are ya gonna do?

-build things

-you gotta destroy something to build something else

-that's one way of looking at it

¢

¢

cowboy coffee. bacon and beans. quiet campfire before the storm. they finish their meal.
hobble their horses. lead the mule to the nearby bridge.

they unpack the sticks and the string that ties them together.

they walk the trestle. leave little packages of sticks and string tied up nice for a holiday.
like boxing day. or decoration day. it's a chore getting all those explosives distributed and
tied together. until finally they're convinced there are way too many explosives on the
bridge.

they sit, feet dangling, on the edge of the bridge. below are rocks and water. sound of
water below. beneath. they smoke and rest.

-alright enough of this (puff puff)

-yeah let's get rollin fore we build us a nice little summer home hereabouts

they run a line away from the bridge to the cover provided by some large boulders a few
hundred yards away from the bridge. they rig up the plunger. wires and strings and lines
and twine and yarn.

-fore!

the bridge explodes.

were this a cartoon the explosion would send the nearly atomized bridge into nothingness
and as the dust clears the bridge would fall back to the earth in the form of a fort or
mansion constructed of matchsticks.

the dynamite rips the bridge to splinters.

the remains of the bridge and nearby shrubbery and trees burn.

Oscar and the lieutenant pick up the detonator. pack it on the mule and walk back to
their horses. headin home.

-that one was a fucking riot

-don't get much better'n that

-guess we should get back to the ranch.

they get home the next day around noon. they stop on the way to stow the tools of their
trade in a small cave.

¢

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(out of commotion)

you climb under bridges
dangle over rivers
like massive origami cranes
the kind that pick things up

the girders arranged to converge
create an illusion of surprising ingenuity
riveted to its own master

the harbor is an ocean
with a view
of harp and altar
lit by a fleet
seen from piers

killed again by sacrifice
and a serenade
standing on the edge of water

¢

6

another interlude
your hair is like the sargasso sea

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lush veneer of drifting deep blue water
and your hair is like the sargasso sea
an intricate web of life much farther
from land than water.

portugal says the
curlyheaded girl is the kind of nest
i'm going for. and kept, snared in that
trap with scooby and shaggy and the rest
who walk across that legend seaweed mat.
a pirate ghost what plays the harpsichord,
dissembled wrecks and forgotten fleets with
any other lost at sea in a myth.
as fish and eels-come-home call: all aboard

to any vacation that breaks the bank
far enough from land it cant be a prank.

¢

¢

and your hair is like the sargasso sea
tangled, adrift, supporting existence
among the weed. i can walk in nascence
from wreck to vessel, myth to cautious lee.
drifting ellipse. turning calm of ocean
currents.

and shaggy wants to play a game
of poker for any snack i can find.
all there is on the nearest hulk: motion,
treasure and kelp called breakfast. what a shame
says shaggy (counting cards) three of a kind.
fuck the ghost. i'm hungry. don't these pirates
ever eat? how bout rod and reel i say
and neon lines. eels and dolphinfish and plates.
we'll burn a hulk to boil our scaly prey.

¢

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the motion mentioned is water, is tides
is ocean. open and less than jagged
like a cutlass slice. calm motion pervades
and your hair is like the sargasso sea.

c'mon shaggy i cant stand to be begged.
like, fly fishing in the bermuda tri-
angle? he says. man i cant wait to see.

(the ocean is hard to keep your hook dry)

we'll eat tonight even if it is fish.
that's shaggy again. this time he succeeds.
he knows how to cast and quickly fills his dish
with what swims among the fertile waterweeds.

if atlantis rose one day this is where
it surfaces like rides at the county fair.

¢

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old harpsichord played by a pirate ghost.
blue or black or red beard. some color sailor.
baited net of music. another tangle
in the weeds. a theme for the triangle.

the tune lends an air. song like a tailor.
ties up rigging and patches sails. the most
you can ask for from a pirate's melody
is magic fit to sail a clippership.

and such turns this tune. notes to wake each wreck
seem to make every vessel echo
with intimate sounds that resemble lips
that sing harmony as from every deck.

and your hair is like the sargasso sea
with secret songs you put a spell on me

¢

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5 trees lost at sea. trunks and sturdy
limbs, long floating, come now to rest in weed
tangled, bound and gagged, like in a dirty
picture or magazine. for sex: plead or bleed.

and your hair is like the sargasso sea
where things without course tend to congregate
where words like driftwood and jetsam, easy
nautical appellations, come to the plate.

the spiral, cyclical notions that he
produces casting for a well-mannered
snack are contagious and continuous
through shaggy's single desire. and the
necessary motion of other ideas ensnared
in this ragged sea is stark and curious.

¢

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me and shaggy make a pile of shit we
hope to burn. some way to turn up the heat.
most everything in the ocean is soggy.
i hope this spittoon will do. says shaggy.
seawater and kelp squishing at his feet.

and your hair is like the sargasso sea
tender turns of metallic drastic curls

yes we get the fire to go despite
an abundance of wet wind that unfurls.
double double and insistent words of care
brought to a boil on a fire: heat and light.

one for you. two for me. shaggy says again
one for you. two for me. is always fair.

eels and fish-come-home swim the spittoon and grin

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one skeletal wreck that stands with less of
a listing angle than other members
of this lost fleet of compromised vessels.

this one house the harpsichord above
all other objects of value and treasures.
the music, tune, magic escapes portals
and saturates this neglected region.
whether found or lost this weedy legion
arranges itself and sings along.

and your hair is like the sargasso sea
tangling me like noodles on silver prongs
turning to the next note which is the be-
ginning of what came up so quick before
marooned on a wet world of myth or lore.

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7

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a cul de sac where you park your car.
this is a good place to park
for the sake of staying in the car.

the statue and the driver are
getting out of the buick.

not that
there's anything especially
unpleasant about the buick itself.
but i guess that's been established.
same for staying in the buick.

but out out with you

the statue and the driver walk the path
indicated by the specific sign: party!

the path is shaded by cedars
and other conifers and a variety
of broadleaf deciduous flora.

they walk quietly.
each taking the point in turn.
both entranced.

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things to entrance:

- trees
- light (lack of or quality)
- a driver
- acorns
- elephants
- a statue
- fire
- moon
- a beautiful lady
- pine cones
- an owl
- bridges

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they reach. at the end of this meandering footpath through the woods. a previously mentioned covered bridge. what's that in the dark? lit at four corners. by lanterns. they pause a moment and consider the barred doors. silently they perform the rote action of dis-barring the doors. each pushes a large door open. from the other side. through the cover of the bridge they hear the faintest shuffle of sounds associated with a party. as they walk through the sounds grow louder.

once-rough planks worn by time and travel. parallel lines compose the floor of the bridge. the window on the side is too high to see out of. by backing up to the far wall you can see the sky. it casts a square of light (of itself) on the far wall and the floor.

if there was more light inside the bridge they could see the graffiti on the walls. numerous loves proclaimed in spray paint. reichian spider creatures disguise the grain of the wood. rita loves simon.

when on the other side. un-barred. un-doored. gateless. they step off the bridge to the soft earth they are greeted with evening. they turn to see the doors on the other side close. quietly.

also downstream
they see a man
wading.
performing actions
necessary to convince
fish to fly.

his neon movements circle
and follow and complete
imploring the fish
to take the bait.

¢

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oh shit! the goldfish. i'll fill you in. the name doesn't matter. but somewhere in the course of the proceedings she says:

-oh shit

-what? [mind you it's not often those two words escape the solid lips of a statue]

-the goldfish

-shit

-i have to go back

-i'll come with you

-that would be best

-let's go

-i hadn't even thought about it. about the goldfish. but it happened. i didn't forget it so we have to go back.

and they walk back the length of the path and the statue retrieves the goldfish from the back seat of the buick.

and what do they do with the goldfish. you remember our friend who avoided that caustic tiltowhirl. jostled and plastic bagged and pingponged. the goldfish swims patiently this 1/3 volume of water.

the beautiful woman called a statue removes the plastic bag. water, goldfish and all. including the nearly tiny supply of fishfood called a guppy's meal. she brings these things along back to the point where they turned around. back to the bridge and they cross.

a goldfish driving in circles in a plastic bag carried around by a statue. out of the seat of the buick.

they cross to the sounds of a party apparent on the other side. sounds for sure they hear and the state of mind of a party is conveyed this way. orchestrated incidental music of nature by way of civilisation.

there in the brook, stream, the tributary spanned by the covered bridge, the angler performs the dance and magic of casting.

the statue and the driver kneel down by the aforementioned tributary despite or in spite of the wading man, fisherman, angler and there they deposit the goldfish. yes first they place the sealed plastic bag in the water to acclimate the fish to the new water temperature. they leave the bag there a few minutes.

-so this is what you want to do with your fish?

-i thought i would murder it

-this seems better

-i've never murdered a goldfish

-lucky you

they unseal the top of the plastic bag. keeping it upright. preparing themselves to free the goldfish. really this is the statue setting the beast free. it's her goldfish. the driver is a spectator. this is silent ritual. the statue tilts the bag slowly ninety degrees until the bag is horizontal, submersed and entirely filled with water. including the negligible percentage of goldfish. unsealed.

the goldfish. not entirely slow on the uptake. figures it out and works the way out of the plastic bag into the river. there where it is moving water and no plastic bags or pingpong balls or jostling. could be eaten by something. but that's a chance to take.

the goldfish swims around not too far off.

and as a final step of her release spell the statue scatters the smattering of fishfood to the water as additional offering and good tidings to fishy friends. thanks even. casting.

the goldfish has a nibble.

the statue and driver stand from their knees and walk away. the driver folds the plastic bag and sticks it in his left ass pocket.

here, on the other side of the bridge, they follow a path still. the same sign guides them. the come out into the clearing and see the many fires and lights. the music is mixing and melting everything together and there are things going on even in the darkness. sounds of sex and sick and laughter and oration and mournful lone musicians not yet drawn back to the fire.

immediately they find a fire to their liking. the first they come to. they freely sample the concoctions of various cauldrons. the driver drops the plastic bag into the campfire.

and the music. they dance.

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let it run its natural course. i'm talking about the party. but i could be talking about the water. could be talking about a lot of things.

at the party:

but Barnaby and Al and the gypsy woman and the young lady disembark the cablecar when they reach the other side of the ravine. water rattling through well below. none the worse for wear.

laughing even as they finish off the bottle the young lady brought along. the last of the beer is long gone.

they follow the sign on their path: party! the signs get more excited as they progress. and here out of the cablecar they can hear the music and ruckus of the party and they recognise the glow in the trees.

they enter the clearing from the far side. they are obliged to pass by the various mounts and conveyances on their way to the main body of the party. where everything appears to be happening.

they see two elephants engaged in what can only be described as reunion.

it is evident the elephants are pleased to be in the company of themselves. like they've been waiting patiently, as elephants do, to make acquaintances. again.

young lady: look at the elephants

Barnaby: wow

Al: awful friendly

gypsy woman: they've been apart a long time

Barnaby: what?

gypsy woman: they've been separated for years

young lady: how did they get back together?

gypsy woman: they knew it would happen

Al: damn. you are good at your job

Barnaby: where did they come from?

young lady: how did they get here?

gypsy woman: i don't know

Al: but you knew the rest?

gypsy woman: yes. and they told me

¢

¢

Al and rebecca. Barnaby and jill walk through the lush field of the clearing to the waiting party. jill finds a barrel to drop her bottle in. someone was conscientious enough to supply rubbish bins.

they hear all the sounds of the party and they are set on the center of the party where lives the tallest bonfire. the largest ring of dancers and collection of musicians. and the hugest barrels of the strongest concoctions. the heftiest pigs on spits.

and as inward they travel. (what is this dante?) they pass an upright piano. a midwestern man in a funny wide-brim hat is plunking away at 'ole buttermilk sky' as his own accompaniment.

young lady: is that hoagy carmichael?

they keep walking.

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off to one side. and yes this is something to see. a couple robust gentlemen shoot skeet. the skeet flung into the air are somehow flaming discs so they can be seen against the night sky.

teddy is kicking mark twain's ass. or at least has the lead.

TR: pull!

blam.

and the blazing skeet shatters and falls in sparking cinders that fade as they near the ground. a light show of shooting stars.

teddy reloads the spent chamber of his double-barrel.

mark: it'd be a bitch if the woods caught fire

TR: pull!

mark gooses teddy with his cane. blam. TR misses. blam. he does not miss again.

TR: got it with the second shot. mark you ornery motherfucker.

mark: i need every point i can get

TR: it's your turn

mark: gladly

he offers the cane to teddy and tosses it a few feet away.

mark fills the two smoking chambers with fresh rounds and sets himself.

mark: pull!

blam.

another shattered skeet.

mark: roosevelt you pompous bastard.

mark pops in another shell.

mark: pull!

blam.

teddy has returned with the cane by now and gives mark a good goose. mark hits his target with one shot.

mark: i bet you wanted to make a joke about a big stick

TR: you always spoil a good joke

mark: give me that cane

they exchange shotgun for cane.

teddy's horse, algonquin, bronze, swats at flies with his tail and chews oats.

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news of the middle-west

last night a fire broke out in the elephant house at the zoo

zoo administrators hesitantly credit the elephants for effecting the apparent safe escape of all the building's residents.

'i've often though they were letting us keep them there' said a zoo employee. 'i guess they've always known how to get out. i mean how often do you hear about a rhino or a giraffe that saves the day'

as yet most of the animals have not been accounted for

'it's puzzling that something the size of a full grown elephant could be missing and several of 'em at that'

no remains have been discovered in the smoking ruins of the elephant house.

the elephants allegedly opened each enclosure and somehow managed to get the large main doors of the elephant house open.

hieronymous waltner, a serious scholar at the smithsonian institute, who has nothing to do with the zoo, the fire or the midwest said it was 'definitely something big'

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9

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an injun chief. or a powerful brave.

wearing multiple totems of the most respected variety. the most magical and noble of totems. eagle feathers. bone beads. (lost cultures) bits of wild animals and the scalps of bitter rivals.

blood on his tommyhawk. the feathers in his hair and clothes are leaves on vibrant hall-trees. his horse sweats hot mountain streams. the saddle blanket is soaked.

hot and maybe bothered. horse and injun have been hauling ass. hot footin. stumble not to fall. an escape. men in blue in hot pursuit.

this injun arrives and all in a dither starts out tellin his troubles in a mangled concoction of words in some sevral languages. none of which combine easily to form communication.

all these words to Marvin. who is wise even in these ways of sign language and cuneiform.

-are you just makin this language up as you go along?

-heap big man at teeth with my ankles

¢

¢

for the sake of confusion Oscar and the lieutenant swagger around the corner of the building just arrived from out on the range.

the injun tries to hide himself and his lathered horse behind the comparatively diminutive form of Marvin leaning on his axe.

-you boys been chasin after this here injun?

-not us Marv. says Oscar.

-i don't chase them boys anymore. says the lieutenant.

Marvin turns to the injun. brave or chief he's concerned for hisself.

Marvin: don't you worry yourself none. these two is harmless as can be [he makes several signs of safety and assurance] big man broken [re: the lieutenant's mix and match union blues wardrobe]

¢

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the injun seems to've caught on.
he doesn't know the lieutenant but he's heard of him.
knows he's a fierce fighter and without full complement
of navy blue and sabre
he's a friend to be had.

-listen we'll help you. says Marvin.

Oscar you get the saddle off his
horse here and put it where it
caint be found. and you [meaning
the lieutenant] get the saddle off
your horse and put it on this one here.

they set about their chores as Marvin
escorts the injun inside the house and hides
him under the floorboards in what serves
as a root cellar and would be underground
railroad out east. but Marvin's always up
for this line of questioning.

-sometimes you got somethin you need to hide

¢

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Oscar and the lieutenant stroll into the kitchen.

there is no sign of the injun.

-now you two boys grab some vickshuls
for the road
and head over to that cave in the gap
and come back after dark or tomorrow

some machine guns patter like Marvin give orders.

-he has an army horse so i can pass it off as mine.
says the lieutenant.

-that helps. says Oscar.
as he grabs bacon, coffee,
beans and drops a skillet in a gunny sack.

-anything else we might need is still on the horses.
says the lieutenant.

-while you're over there see if there aint any stock
thinkin about a little vacation through that gap. maybe
you could set up a roadblock in that narrow draw.
keep em where we can count em

-at least he's smart enough not to stand up to the cavalry.
says the lieutenant.

-else it'd be the end of the road. says Oscar.

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¢

Oscar and the lieutenant

take a routine range ride.
the must to continue.
lay low most creatively
by being conspicuous.
obvious and present co-
mmitters of no sin. able
to throw stones. ineligible
for harassment.

an army
of soldiers is riding horses
along about their duties and who
do they come across
but this prolific pair of paladins.
no, really, we're ranchhands.

-i even got a lariat

¢

¢

-you seen any injuns?

-them injuns is your job aint they?

says Marvin to the pair of scouts sent to the ranch by the cavalry detachment that serves as local constabulary and savage management. these are young men from kansas or another ineffectual state of the american middle.

-you boys want some coffee?

-naw. we gotta rendezvous to make

-i guess it's good the whole troop didn't stop in. i'd hate to have to fix coffee for all y'all

the two soldiers laugh at this. now at ease with Marvin.

-how long you think it'll take us to get to that bend where the creek doubles back?

-that where you're meeting up?

-yessir

-it's just a couple mile that way. but i don't know if you'll have time for that coffee. just as well. i'm building on my chicken coop.

-you don't need no weasels gettin in there

the horsemen rein in the direction of the creek.

-see ya'll later. have a good ride

-we gotta find us an injun

-good luck. i'll tell him you're lookin for him if i see him

¢

¢

Oscar and the lieutenant
take a truly routine ride.
along the way they come across
a squad of blue-clad knights.
all old friends of the lieutenant.

-howdy lieutenant says one of the boys
-how's the brigadier treatin you boys?
-same as always. always askin the wrong questions. how's life?
-goin alright. headin over t'the gap to be sure them steers aint headin out t'the
hinterlands
-we thought you was headin back east
-goin the slow way. stopped in here to make a buck against a rainy day
-they sure don't pay you much ridin these ponies. this your ranch, friend?
-naw says Oscar. b'longs to my uncle
-what brings you boys out this way? says the lieutenant
-lookin for us an injun what run off. on one of them US goverment ponies no
less
-must've been hungry says the lieutenant
-guess so. well we're off to make our report. we'll keep running into you nice
and quiet like
-see ya'll later. hope you get what you're after

the boys in blue ride off
to find a sunset
and their commanding officer
to tell him they seen nothin.

another injun disappeared
like it come natural.

¢

¢

Oscar and the lieutenant get to the gap long enough before dark to give the range a good going over. they fall a few trees across the mouth of the draw to keep the stock out. decide a couple sticks of dynamite will solve all their problems by blowing up rocks to make an embankment.

-these trees'll do for now

Oscar and the lieutenant hobble the horses and build a cookfire at the mouth of the cave. they have a meal and coffee with water from a spring.

they sit and smoke and talk about bridges in quiet tones like they were young ladies at a dance.

they do not discuss the indian in their cupboard. the redman in the root cellar.

Oscar tells about a bridge over the ohio river and eads bridge in stlouis. examples of how to get across.

-there's a bridge north of the fort. in some of the wildest injun country

-but there'd be the fort to worry about

-i was thinking about that. we'd have to go deep into injun country

-we'd have to make it worth it. we'll have to hit something on the way back

-the first one won't be rebuilt by then

-we could really cripple somebody

-we'll have to set it up before hand

-and make it clear it's not the injuns

¢

¢

after dark Marvin lets the injun out of the ground.
the first thing the injun asks for is tobacco.

the injun sits on a bearskin rug on the floor.
Marvin takes to a rocking chair from back east.
Marvin provides tobacco.
they smoke the indian's pipe
by the light of the fireplace.

the injun laments big blue man
and the iron horse
and his tribe being forced
here and there and forced
to combat white man's steel.
the injun wants to hunt.

Laika. that young pup. barks at the injun
's gesticulation called language.

he asks Marvin if this dog belongs to the lieutenant.

-hell i guess he does
-him good girl

little Laika licks the injun's hand

Marvin puts the injun to bed on the pallet near the fire. Laika lies with him and the
bearskin.

-yeah i kilt that bahr

in the morning the redman is making injun-style cornbread when Marvin comes into the
room on his way outside to milk the chickens.

-you can tell Oscar you done his job

¢

¢

Oscar and the lieutenant get a good night's sleep in the cave. they have breakfast, pack their horses and survey the previous evening's work.

-well. back to the ranch
-i wonder how Marv's doin

they hop their ponies and head em home. they have a lot of work ahead of them.

they ride into the ranch with the wind at their backs and still, but barely, within the first half of the day. smoke forms the chimney and Laika comes running and barking at the heels of their horses.

they put the horses to pasture and go inside to rustle up some coffee.

inside. at the rough kitchen table sits Marvin and the injun talking about iron and blue.

Marvin couldn't keep at the chicken coop this morning so he gave it up to sit with the injun and wait for the boys to get back from the gap.

the injun, whose native tongue transforms his name into something much more pleasing, ends up known as: sings-circles. by way of Marvin's translation to Oscar and the lieutenant.

the injun is, as it turns out, not only a powerful brave in his tribe but also a protégé of the medicine man.

sings-circles follows his own way to the shaman's post. he will someday replace the elderly medicine man and provide an effective service of healing and learning and safety to his tribe and those who visit to hear from him and sit in his circle.

this is why he carries the most respected and mojo-intensified totems known in these parts. only his mentor has a greater collection of shamanic ikons.

but for now they all have coffee and the lieutenant feeds Laika the gizzard of a turkey he shot on the way home. gobble gobble.

¢

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as a young brave sings-circles dominated even the mature warriors as a hunter and trapper. and at the ritual campfires he danced the courage of his quarry with the dexterity and deference of the hunt.

his songs kept the bonfire's circle burning until dawn. when, hopped up on some organic magic and joy, sings-circles returned to the hunt. this continued for days and stimulated the entire tribe into a time of plenty. many dances were made and the tribe prospered.

the medicine man. the elderly bachelor great-uncle of sings-circles. who kept an old midwife squaw. chose sings-circles as his protégé when sings-circles was a boy with a miniature bow and a proclivity toward spying on secret medicine rituals.

this powerful brave would be chief but for being chosen to become shaman.

a certain indian maiden. a handy one with the bow and the only person sings-circles allows to hunt beside him. led him to doubt the tradition of the shaman remaining a bachelor. which tradition his uncle essentially eschewed with his midwife squaw.

¢

there is a lot of talk through the afternoon on the ranch. only the necessary chores are performed. quickly at that.

to continue this pow-wow. palaver. parley. by the stone hearth of Marvin's ranch. on the hide of a bahr kilt by Marv himself.

sings-circles' familiarity with the lieutenant lends a certain air. and the lieutenant has heard also of this powerful brave. and the talk is respectful and they trade the necessary tidbits of information. present childhoods and what's going on now and all over the subject of iron and blue.

as it happens sings circles' tribe lives in the very same injun country north of the fort Oscar and the lieutenant discussed the night before.

the seed of an idea is planted.

Oscar and the lieutenant ask questions about the terrain and getting there and who's in charge.

the curtains fold and unfold in the wind. the men sit below the wafting chimney and pass the pipe to pass the time and seal the pact of the help they've proffered to the injun.

¢

¢

if two or more share the sacred pipe
they are bound to tell the truth.
every utterance be verity.

when asked the injun tells how he'll get home.
his method is not conventional material transit.
he travels through the earth. how do you think
all them injuns escaped?

with drums and trance and a thought of water
or a hollowed tree. or stump. gateways
to travel beneath the earth. one version
of underworld.

what's below.

and upon the drums and water and through,
into an according abyss. this way the injun
is placed in a world of motion.

and what's there? some power animal.
some product of the dance of beasts.
buffalo or bear or eagle. depending
on protector and protected.
hitch a ride with or on that beast.

some quiet world meant for movement.

that's how he'll go back. singing song
of his power. of his animal.

avoiding any men in blue riding ponies.
the only people you'll see are doing the same.
going somewhere without this world
's necessary maps and terrain.

¢

¢

through some combination of latency and will they are able to join the injun. as time passes and the plans progress language becomes less a problem. they're past learning to communicate.

language is integrated to thought. and thought to motion. (action)

spaced out by intervals of nothing. they perform tasks leisurely. each his own. brief greetings and exchanges when their paths intersect. (cross) unquestioning. no snooping. placid action.

[the force of the pattern of chaos]

thus. things are gathered. wood is split. the injun stretches some hides to be tanned.

all this time the casting is at its work. building up to itself. making its own preparations. cutting its own firewood and a little extra. each action summed up produced a day in life. unwitting to anything. let alone itself. like it could be substituted for a day in life. one day. any life. one life any day. it's not confusing only because it is never the object of thought.

¢

¢

three of them. Oscar. injun. lieutenant. on horses. the boys going along as an escort and to see the country. unless it sees them first.

there is a small river that flows all around. this is their object. destination. any bend in the river. (must have something to do with it)

as these three set out on the trail. dusty steeds below. behind them lights out little Laika, at their heels, then darting off into the woods on some track or another. to return by another chance down the trail. barks and crashes through enthusiastic brambles.

-what about that dog?

-she'll be fine. she never comes far

the injun has nothing to say to the other two but turns to address Laika in a tongue illegible and distant. the speech isn't so much heard as smelled. it is not long.

and Laika understands it.

¢

¢

Laika continues following.

the three continue also.

eventually Laika alters her pattern of chase and follow. she darts to the woods. circles and proceeds to stalk the horse-board trio.

the bend in the creek is a few miles from the ranch compound. they have chosen a portion of the creek unlikely to be frequented by union blue. a ford navigable only at the driest times. this is the opposite of one of those times.

-it's a good time for game. says the lieutenant.
-where we are going buffalo is plentiful. say sings-circles.
-and ferocious. says Oscar.
-many are the hoofprints on the mesa. says the injun.
-umm. says Oscar.

they approach the small river. riding a disused trail. narrow but direct. it leads the horses to water.

the casting resumes its station as the subject at hand.

again the injun begins telling it. once begun this spell is cast like iron. or the liberty bell without a crack or being mended.

the injun proceeds to complete the casting. the water of the creek moves like it is. it is their medium.

from a to b not a straight line but a shortcut. the straightest line is a shortcut.

¢

¢

the horses get their ankles wet.

as they do deeper they become less tangible. more transient.
slowly they fade. for them their surroundings take the fader.
nod out of solidity.

an unforeseen wilderness begins to materialize.
from one wilderness into the next. from out of nowhere.
appears barking Laika. a dog with a mission.
her first leap from bank to wet. several feet into the channel.
brings her to the dogpaddle. and she seems the same
translucence and transformation.
her forepaw touches sand
on a shallow bar
in a stream
in this quiet land of night.

¢

and there they stand. wet-ankled horses and all. on the bank of a stream in this quiet land
of night.

Laika barks.

a clear imperceptible darkness.
like evening.
light enough to see your feet before you
and the landscape to cross.

here they travel.
a distance equal.
greater.
different.
shorter.
all.
a variety of lengths.
unbound maps.
means of getting there.

and there avoiding certain sorts of obstacles.
namely men in blue out to get injuns.
none of them in this underworld.

¢

¢

they ride through the turning night as the injun considers his destination.

this quiet land of night is how to get where you're going for uncommon travelers
impatient with roads and mappable motion.

-what about that dog?

-guess she's coming with us

plodding along the trail. on their way.

¢

the work to be done on the chicken coop is less. but remains at the top of Marvin's list.

and when that's done he'll have another project to do.

¢

¢

what would two cowboys, an injun and a dog think if riding through this quiet land of night they saw a buick driving circles around a statue. or an elephant ferrying a curlyheaded girl and pan and an orphan who knows where? or any other ostrich hunting stranger. you see a real big bird come through here?

but none of these are on their list of encounters.
as the hunnerd sided die rarely lands on 1 or 100.

but there are plenty of others they'll run into just around the bend.

and as they ride. small dog nipping at horse heels.

plenty paths to cross.

as is what happens.
up ahead a cloud of dust comes closer.
a dervish of mansize proportions approaches.

¢

the dervish approaches. dust a fury of the cloud around the figure of a man on a horse.
approaching.

rattling sabre and hard hoofbeats.

they see it's a man in uniform.
none they recognize.

Algonquin, the bronze horse, pulls up short and stutters a whinny of cloud.

teddy exhales roughly and frees the dust from his abundant moustache.

¢

¢

as the dust settles around teddy and Algonquin
Laika approaches to sniff at the hooves of teddy's horse.

TR: how bout that dog?

Oscar: she's alright

injun: sniff the next hooves

Algonquin leans his snout down to catch a whiff of the pup.

Algonquin snorts for the dust.

Laika barks. twice.

the horse loses interest and tries to fraternize with the nearest beast of the equine persuasion. which is the lieutenant's US gover'nment pony.

sings-circles has met that teddy before in this very land of night.
between charges. dances. worlds.
always a trusty steed and a big stick.

teddy often travels here.

hither and yon. thence. whence.

(mostly yon)

they have talkt about the quiet across campfires with other travelers mingled in the same shamanic circles. same circles.

¢

¢

however you shake it the dust settles.
whatever you're shaking. teddy's thor-
oughly gloved gauntlet of a hand. Laika's
paw. the injun's rattle. Oscar's change
purse. (on a leather thong around his
neck) the grinds in the lieutenant's
coffee cup.

they've been going long
enough. however long that is. they
agree with teddy to build a meal and
burn a twig or two.

Oscar sets about
bacon and beans. teddy stirs the coffee.
sings-circles contrives a fresh-killed
rabbit. Laika alternatively frolics
in the woods and bugs the lieutenant
for scraps, attention and fetch.

the lieutenant makes a spit. sings-
circles feeds Laika steaming bunny
entrails.
fresh.

¢

¢
and the fire.

they enjoy a meal not unlike those
we've seen before.

-you know teddy,
if you smoke that you have to tell the truth

other times and other sideburns.

they have enough tin plates and drinking vessels.
even a plate for the dog.

clinking utensils. horses hobbled to nearby
witchhazel bushes.

sounds of pleasurable ingestion of foodstuffs abound.

TR: that's a damn good rabbit
injun: kills your hankerin for hasenpfeffer
lieutenant: you fucked the coffee up teddy. is this gravel from the creek?
Oscar: give the guy a break. i'm sure he's a busy man being a colonel
and all.
TR: just charged san juan hill
injun: again?

TR: good to the last drop
¢

10

¢
when in love with a statue
a sculptor's instructions.

the vocal stylings of a chisel.
marble flakes like soap
at the hand of a sharp knife
and falls to the warm linoleum.

the vocal stylings of a circular path.
engraved.
in the cold linoleum.
like sliding on ice in the gutter.

the lines describing the surface
of a beautiful woman called a statue.
warm & representational.

the sculptor assigns lines, contours
& meaning to an amorphous stone hide
reveals calm marble patience
& the friendly form of a woman.

like a flaming bush
talks
with the serious piety and permanence
of graffiti on an overpass

the statue smiles
as if from atop a pedestal.

the sculptor wipes white dust
from most everything
& turns to listen.

¢

11

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her name is a statue
her name is curls with a girl
pan is here and there. (i met a
statue today, ma) the curlyheaded
girl sits on a rock watching a
fire. finishing a large drink.
hearing music. to dance.

she drains her generous cup and
hops from the boulder. (little to
compare to hopping on boulders)

again it's the girl with the flowers
she sees.

-hi there

-hello

-come dance

-that's what the skirt's for

and what's when dancing but music?
sound. somehow gravity relinquishes her.

after a dance that serves to call them parched and sweating they sidle up to a
chilled vat of spiked juice.

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the curlyheaded girl and the young lady
walk through the shower of lightning bugs.

one starts a whistle. a brief note or two. like a prompt
or a cue. or the call of an early morning bird waiting
its turn for a response. by the necessity of some other
bird's call. some other bird's inevitable call.

(or response)

to differentiate between the two is mute.
every response is a call which came first.
variety.

i digress

one starts a whistle. brief notes. a cue.

it is difficult to whistle while smiling.

and, naturally, the other follows,
responds, calls. shape notes
whistled not sung. whistled
instead of sung.

thus begins an exchange.
some of the repetition correlates.
a trade. barter. an entire economy.

a conversation. a circuit. casting a circle
around each other in order for embrace.
(of. to. by. an.) embrace.

the currency of communication

whistled currency. whistlin in the dark. notes exchanged. banked. dots made
lines made shapes. circles. bridges. statuary composed of irregular sound.
regulated sounds. notes. shapes to spell.

¢

¢

the curlyheaded girl hops from her rock. a tall boulder. back down to the ground floor of the party. she refills her drink from the nearest bubbly vat of libation. up walks the daisy distributing young lady who so likes the girl with the curls' skirt.

-welcome back

-i didn't leave

-you may have been watching. but you weren't participating

-umm

-welcome back

they walk, talking, from circle to circle of the expanding party.

the outermost circle is a waterway. the stream they all had to cross. bridges are for crossing.

they walk to this outermost circle. this all-encompassing ring of water.

they stand on stone on the bank. the stone is large. overlooks the water. they turn to face the center of the water's circle. to one side. where there are fewer fires and folks. constellations of lightning bugs trade light for the pleasure of procreation.

lightning bugs' chemical complications include arsenic. so don't eat them. though, yes, it would take a lot to kill you.

and far off. past the lightning bugs. a comet rockets from the ground in an arc and in the second half of its parabola quite suddenly explodes, disintegrates and dims as debris sinks back to the clay it came from.

-do they ever stop shooting skeet?

-i think they have a wager

-what kind of wager?

-might be the one who 'accidentally' takes out the most revelers wins knowing those two moody old pigfuckers.

this is a strange voice. hardly the soft tones of these two young ladies. a strange voice from nowhere. from behind them.

the girls turn to see the voice. they see nothing to make such a noise.

aways off. downstream. or up. a man wading turns neon circles with his flyrod. it glows like a rainbow as a whip.

they see that the stones they stand on used to be a bridge. the severed battered tops of former pillars rise ugly and forgotten above the water. they are grown with misinformed foliage.

-some view huh

the voice is disembodied with a strange echo.

-umm. says the curlyheadedgirl

-umm. says the young lady

-no matter which way you turn

the voice comes from the water

-right right. enough of this game

the girls look at each other with smiling suspicion.

-over here

there is a splash of water

curlyheadedgirl: are you a talking fish?

laughter accompanies another larger splash. a big fish jumps out of the water. flips and returns.

fish: yes

a moment elapses.

fish: well not entirely a fish. but that's getting down to brass tacks. being too particular. do you realise how ridiculous it is for an air-breathing fish to walk around on dry land having chats with passersby? it's like a midget dolphin. or a scaly midget. might as well wear a bowler and smoke a cigar.
but. you were saying?

young lady: she asked if you were a talking fish

fish: yes

curlyheadedgirl: good

young lady: what's the muzzle velocity of a shotgun?

fish: who me?

young lady: nevermind.

-should we take him seriously?
-serious as a spit shake

fish: see. that's what i mean. imagine if i was tromping around anthropomorphizing myself. could you keep from laughing? i think you'd have stitches in your side. and not from the harpoon injury you suffered a few weeks back.

-wow
-talkative
-sure is

the girls do laugh at the fish. the fish appreciates the laughter.

it is hard for a fish to smile.

¢

it is hard for a fish to smile.

no one's sure if he said it or not.

including him.

-yes. the view is beautiful
-everything you can look at is astounding and beautiful

fish: yes we are in lucky waters. but also it's looking at the other waters you're in. irons in the fire. pots on to boil. too many kettles not enough injuns. soup. boils.

-so why are you here?

fish: just cause a fish cant smile doesnt mean he don't like a party. people act different when you have a straight face.

-well. i guess you're not a bottom feeder

fish: that's the spirit

fish: gunfish remedy's the name. have a card. but it's kelp and only keeps in water. got to stay wet or it dries and crumbles to dust like aquaman or something. namor. those kids are a trip. winged feet and heroism. such competition. when's the last time you saw them at a party? might as well wait around for prospero. or atlantis. like the world's really science fiction.

so you've told me
you're interested in dancing and in case you're ever a fish you can always count on a little cash from dancing. just dance like this.

the fish demonstrates deftly
an experimental fin dance per-
formed mostly out of the water
in the air above. or skipping
along atop the water by the use
of his tail. tailwalk they call it.

-i'm sure i'll remember that one

the water and the fish calm
after the fish's dance and speech.

the curlyheaded girl and the young lady gulp from their buckets.

-do you drink?

fish: well. only water. but it's more like breathing and you cant
breathe vodka. as much as you might like to

-that's too bad

fish: entirely

curlyheadedgirl: am i the widow of a man or the wife of a fish?

fish: i'm no hero of the navy

-do you woo the other water-breathers?

-and teach them to talk

-like a missionary

fish: i talk to who listens and wait for a response.
or the tide to change.

blam. blam.

they hear the shots and turn
to see exploded clay pigeons
tumble to the ground in the form
of dust.

younglady: are there others in the creek as interesting as you?

fish: i haven't made it all the way around. but there are rumors. and
a goldfish.

-and a man fishing

fish: yes he is so tempting.

blam. blam.

two more comets explode at the hand of mark twain.
he and teddy have gotten serious about their skeetshoot.

the girls keep their whistles wet and soon their drinks are nearly drained.

-we're gettin low on booze

fish: don't let me keep you from your libation. just try me again
somewhere along the circle. sounds like there may be a few
stops along the way worth making. maybe a leprechaun will fall
in the water and i can torment him.

the girls agree to try to catch the fish later.
they follow their noses to the nearest booze.
use their empty vessels as dousing wands.

¢

¢

better yet. instead of some wild fishchase.

the girls refill their cauldrons at a nearby vat.
they find a place to leave their drinks as they
assault the dance flattened ground of the nearest
circle.

the flames play at licking the sky. the girls
move. silhouettes as the rest. in the circle. stamping.
moving. feeling the thump of other feet and drums
as they briefly commune with the surface before
the next step launches them again to the air. as
gravity relinquishes the necessity of holding. as
their eyes stand between open and closed. and
they dance. warm to sweating and through with
sounds and light from the fire.

¢

¢

pan slips through as any other character of the dance would.
gives his regards to the curlyheaded girl. regrets. says hallo
to the other young lady and quickly excuses himself to greet
newcomers.

(truly to frolic off to the woods again to fuck a nymph)

¢

the girls. tired from the dance. return to their drinks. lean against a large rock.
replenish their tired and dried gullets with wine.

-let's fill these up again

they refill their halfempty gauntlets and resume their previous meanders about
the party compound.

-i wish we'd asked him about mister remedy

-him?

-he stopped and said hello to us

-oh. him. he was

-quickly on his way

-busy being a host

-playing a song

¢

¢

TR: nick. nick. why's that damn'd machine of yours stopped?

Mark: well any break is well placed. but why have we stopped?

nikola: i am building a new one

Mark: a new break?

nikola: a new machine

TR: now dammit. we were in the middle of the round

Mark: were we? i'm sure i've lost my place

TR: a new machine?

Mark: really? a new machine?

nikola: yes. an improvement on the first. but entirely rebuilt. it is nearly complete.

Mark: will it throw the pigeons farther?

TR: and light them?

Mark: will they explode more dramatically when you shoot them?

Mark: will they explode even if you don't shoot them?

TR: it's not easy to shoot a pigeon in the dark you know

nikola: i would prefer that you not refer to the clay discs as pigeons. call them skeet.

TR: when is this new machine beginning anyway?

Mark: i think we'll have time for a drink. perhaps a cigar. have you any teddy?

TR: yes yes mark. the supplies. as you know. are placed over here on this table next to the shotgun rack and umbrella stand.

Mark: nick. do tell us about the NEW machine. what does it do?

nikola: the flight path of the flaming clay discs. skeet. i hear they are called. has been altered to give slightly more flight time factoring in the qualities of the darkness and the flames and other parameters that may be a tad boring.

Mark: and where is the generator? i haven't seen any of your towers around.

nikola: the machine extracts the magical energy necessary to perform its tasks directly from the earth. the energy is transmitted freely from my laboratory through the ground.

TR: through the ground? nick, you're kidding.

nikola: i have nearly perfected a machine to fabricate the skeet themselves. we have several crates in any case. and yes this model lights the skeet easily when they are launched

¢

¢

this is the scene the girls have wandered into.
past that no-good watchdog Algonquin.

teddy and mark stand just away from the at-rest shotgun.
they have drinks and cigars. another man. obscured by
the furniture and the men. appears to be tinkering.

curlyheadedgirl: teddy!

hello my dear! teddy booms a barrelchested shotgun.

young lady: court seems to be in recess

Mark: we're being fitted for a new machine

young lady: would you like to be fitted with a new daisy?

Mark: you might be women of a dangerous ilk befriending a scoundrel
like that

TR: mark. shut up. would you young ladies like some of what we're
drinking?

curlyheadedgirl: it is a party

young lady: ante up

TR: nick. you want a drink?

nikola: (from afar) yes. yes. of course

curlyheadedgirl: who's that?

Mark: that's nick. he builds machines

TR: with electricity

¢

¢

Men With Guns

Blam!

Mark: who's keeping score anyway?

Mark: Pull!

Blam!

Mark: I seem to be doing well

TR: give me that shotgun

Mark: now teddy. Be a gentleman

our teddy snatches the gun from Mark.

it is teddy's gun. Mark insists on using it.

there are several more on the rack by the umbrella stand.

Mark even brought his own. but he wants to use this one

to grate on teddy's nerves. & yes it is a good gun.

perhaps the best in the batch. a winchester.

overunder. skeetgun. also good for geese.

kicks harder'n Algonquin.

¢

¢

they drink with Mark & teddy & nikola. who all three keep up the jabs at each other. the girls pick their spots carefully and poke a few tender ribs.

Nikola's brand new skeet flinging machine takes up working as a hobby that turns into a habit.

as the machine begins to work Mark lifts the shotgun. he shot it last.

Mark: pull!

Blam!

TR: wait a goddamn minute!

Mark: now now teddy. remember we are in the presence of ladies. you will have to challenge my position according to robert's rules of order. due parliamentary process and all that.

Pull!

Blam!

another skeet's molecular construction is altered.
it explodes violently and its former components return to dust.

Mark: hot damn! flaming pigeons!

oh. pardon me ladies

TR: Mark. please pass the shotgun(peashooter)

¢

¢

the girl's name is immaterial. lost in spiral curls. coils of thought and imagination
suspended in motion.

an impeccable likeness of the god of confusion. of pan. purveyor of flute notes.

a type of occupancy. of molecules of air clanging together in chains called
waves.

the impulsive desire of pan is to pounce

upon the curls

with the girl. or her companion. or most any passerby. he has a reputation to
protect. but there are rules and impertinences to be considered. so he drops the
whole matter and takes a gulp of mead.

-hello

-enjoying your'elf?

-this is my friend

-we've met before

-hello (they shake hands. clank glasses) young lady

¢

12

¢

next morning through the valley. largely and expanding. they hear the call of a young boy.
the cry. yell. holler. song of a boy calling a dog he loves.

Laika. Laaaaaaaaiiiiiiiiiikkkkkkkaaaaaaaa. laiiiika.

you get the picture. you can see the sound.

Laika. a boy tells. is his dog.
that barker of an explorer.
wanderer of a hound is his most high love.
every ounce of his cry is the gold of his love for that dog.

a capturing sight a boy and his dog.

Laiiiiika

the ears of a dog lying between the lieutenant's feet on his blanket-made bedroll in this
quiet land of night.

placement. & consequential
derivation. development. diffusion.
and a separate. cordoned off section. for
travel. motion. movement. transit.
less(without) traffic, clutter, rush, daylight
strip malls, strip joints, daylight.

thusly morning began or continued but as this young boy.
this miniature Oscar of 8 or 9 or 10 years.
enthusiastic toward this pup called Laika.

the dog stirs the men couched around the faded campfire.
they begin to put things together for another day's travel.

-what about that dog?
-looks like she's got somethin to tell us.

¢

¢

where lives a boy. a house. outside
this world of travel. this quiet land of
night. an island by a pair of curling brooks.
a house that's climbing and crawling
as a boy. or any man or beast or stranger.
or woman running the house. ordaining
the means to build. the direction
of each stairway the leads comfortably/(indefinitely)
nowhere.

and highways. hallways that cut back on themselves. like paths in hive or hill.
burrows or mountains or castles. longhouses. a mansion with an unknown number of
rooms. always the sound of growing. increasing. saws and hammers. creaks of wood being
fit together. cuts and angles and joints. joists, floor or ceiling or window. door, hall,
cupola. up in the cupola. yes yes the gardens never wither. maintained. augmented and
built. a room replaces a room that replaced a stairway that was once a hallway that was
once a room.

¢

¢
they strike camp. the whole lot
of them. Oscar, lieutenant, injun,
teddy and lil ole Laika.

hop their horses and ride the direction
of a small boy's call.

directly they come upon a large house just visible through the trees.
just across the creek. and there. not far off. is a plank bridge connecting
this quiet land of night to an architectural oddity.

they ride up toward the sizable front porch.
again erupts the call of a boy. Laika's ears perk and point. the group circles to the back of
the house. from whence the voice emanates. there is a labyrinth of a garden called a back
yard.

they dismount. Laika darts toward the house.

some quartet to see shuffle up your garden path.

injun: heap big topiary
TR: i've been in this garden
Oscar: is this the right path?
lieutenant: we'll follow the path to the house

Laika. Laaaiiiiiikkkkaaaaaa...

Laika barks. the boy lets forth a yelp of the joy of discovery. (eureka)

boy: Laika

the dog generously licks the boy's face.

boy: Sarah! Sarah! she's come home!

(TR: Sarah)

our quartet approaches the veranda where boy and dog embrace

boy: howdy

TR: hello son

Oscar: howdy
lieutenant: howdy
injun: how
Laika: woof

TR: what about that dog?
injun: that your dog?
boy: this here's my dog, mister
lieutenant: we're not after your dog

injun: where chief this medicine lodge?
boy: i guess that's Sarah

(TR: Sarah)

a wooden screendoor smacks shut with the screech of a spring.
a woman in black. long sleeves. high collar.
glides across the stone veranda.
¢

¢
when in love with a statue
a reminder
my love trembles like a leaf.
¢

¢

TR: Sarah
Sarah: Theodore

winchester, remington, ruger, colt, baretta, savage, weatherby.

the arguments: oh hunting.
protection. (war?)
business.

Roosevelt approaches mrs. winchester as a social equal. he treats her socially.

from their posture they have something of a past (history)

TR: Sarah
Sarah: theodore

¢

¢

it looks large. this house.
and it is. endless it would seem.
and yes this woman is constantly
building more. with her two
or three-score workmen and
gardeners. carpenters and masons.
one man's been here as long
as she has. decades. years. aeons.

¢

13

¢

news of the middle west.
an update

a girl is missing.

she has not come to work at the now-incinerated elephant house. nor have relatives been able to contact her at home. it is thought she might have been present and incapacitated at the time of the fire. no remains have been discovered.

also unaccounted for is a mature female african elephant and a variety of other once-contained wildlife.

'the fire wasn't really hot enough. it's like we just misplaced them.'

'but how do you misplace a full-grown elephant?'

the esteemed uninvolved scientist previously quoted says:
the universe is expanding.

¢

14

¢

the orphan has turned out
to be a fast learner

be-lucked by a natural grace
at this avocation. toward these
actions. began not long ago
sewing a button on his britches
by now he has mastered
the animation of the irons
in the fire. not to mention
the fire and quite nearly
anything else.

the orphan plays a song
of dancing and circles.

this chiseled likeness called
a beautiful woman is entranced
by the music and the driver
also dances.

they follow the circles. in
flush pursuit of themselves,
the music and the dance.

the orphan's song is an
ample casting. a viable
spell. set to invent movement
in the blaze as well as the crowd.

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¢
statue and driver converge
on a cooler of iced PBR
after losing track
of each other
in the motley danceground.

arm in arm they stroll
to the next bonfire. this is
the largest central bonfire
with the most musicians
and the biggest circle.

the orphan has cycled
through the instruments.
given each a turn. try.

presently he has settled
on the saxophone.

from the fire.
embers, coals, flames, logs
brought to motion.
take the form of a human.
appropriation of the motion of life.
and within the fire
slightly above the coals
a form composed of the fire rises.
takes the shape of a human

pieces of crackling chemical processes
violent oxidation of wood
brought together to compose a whole

a dancing man of fire
like a marionette in hell
or abednego
dancing in the furnace
with his friends
¢

15

**monuments to warriors
an adventure**

¢

you lean against a bench in monument square. a statue dedicated to all this city's lost to war. monument to warriors. atop the granite pedestal is lady victory. sword, shield, chain mail boostier. lady victory stands proud. you are looking across congress street at a uhaul truck you have recently illegally parked. you have the hazard lights on for the ironic fact that within this battered cross-country moving van you have enclosed five drunken, starved, enraged pandas.

you have starved them for the last four days. until their first meal this morning. which consisted of bamboo shoots that had been soaking in tequila for two weeks. breakfast.

you parked the truck and decided you needed a cigarette. before you even lit the cigarette you went back to the truck and ate six or seven of those besodden shoots. that put you to leaning on this bench and dragging this cigarette.

what's with the pandas? you think to yourself again. well. it's art. a roving installation. a true happening. neo-futurist maybe. you are suffering reconsideration. divergent theorems. ad hippopotami.

by now there are police (three) surrounding the panda occupied uhaul. you are drunk on tequila sodden bamboo shoots. at the center of the square stands lady victory. suggestively clad. bronze. impatient for your attentions.

the pandas have become impatient waiting in the hot stuffy bamboo-tequila reek of the uhaul. the police are growing nervous. the shuffling and rustling give way to low moans. the pandas are blitzed and starved.

you ash your cigarette. place it firmly between your teeth and assume the accompanying grimace of physical exertion and smoking concurrently.

you turn to gaze up the length of lady victory's flaxen metal form. she is alluring. stoic. you begin the ascent. up the slick pedestal. up in a sliding but steady fashion.

the recent ingestion of bamboo and tequila rolls as a reminder in your stomach and enables you the superhuman strength necessary to scale to the top of the pedestal where as your energy ebbs again you grasp a luckily placed big toe. you haul yourself up to her level.

as you stand fully erect you are looking back and forth from her sword to her gracefully draped crotch.

you drag off the cigarette. ash. and continue the climb. you grab the shaft of the sword (or shield) in one hand and a stiff fold of her flowing robes in the other.

lady victory breaks out in goosebumps to have such felicitous attentions.

meanwhile back at the uhaul. the officers, conscientious of the very public location draw their nightsticks and cautiously stalk the perimeter of the rental.

the backdoor of the truck begins to rattle. it is latched but not locked.

as you pull yourself higher and gain a foothold above her knee your face is pressed against her exposed breast warmed by the morning sun. you throw your butt to the ground below. you reach slowly with your free hand to the loosely carved garb of her smooth contour. to your surprise (much) it gives to your touch and slides softly aside to reveal a handsomely sculpted nipple.

as any man (person, place or thing) in your situation would you bend your head toward her breast and caress that metallic aureole with your breath. a warm sigh wafts softly in the wind across the square.

some scent or sound has riled the pandas to further excitement. a large delivery truck parades past the uhaul rattling the mirrors. the pandas begin to ram the doors.

-what you think's goin on in there?
-sounds like a domestic dispute. maybe we oughta steer clear
-aint nobody i know domesticatin in no uhaul
-the cops falter.

another truck passes. then a bmw motorcycle with a sidecar occupied by mooseheads, antlers, stuffed squirrels and several fox and otter pelts. the driver is on his way home from taxidermy class.

you suckle at the breast of lady victory. she goes from sigh to moan to a light shudder.

-hey you in there. this is the police. come out with your hands up.

the pandas continue their ruckus.

the rookie cop is designated the backdoor man as the other two officers stand at the ready. he approaches the door. places his hand on the latch.

-hey. cut it out in there. and we'll let you out

the pandas lull.

you climb to sit on lady victory's shoulders to whisper sweet nothings in her ear. as you settle in to tell her about marinating southeast asian roughage...

the rookie cop turns the latch on the back of the becalmed truck. at the sound of the opening latch the pandas back off and prepare to pounce. as the pig slowly swings the door open the crack of light shines on the bloodshot eye of an irate panda bear.

the dogs of war are unleashed.

the first panda leaps at the throat of the quickly eviscerated cop.

as the other pandas take in the scene during the split second of their comrade's flight. there is no thought. they follow the instinct of self-defense. of any cornered beast. the already over-wary cops freeze in shock at black and white and read all over as the ravenous bears maul them.

¢

the least expected maneaters.

pandamonium. you stand on the steady shoulders of lady victory. light another cigarette. it takes nearly a minute from the time the dogs of war are unleashed until the last of the three cops draws his final breath. during this minute from the moment the rookie's throat is ripped out, you scream, shout, holler, yell and cackle like a chicken.

your rooster call confuses the standers by as to the actual species of animal performing this brutality.

other pedestrians grab loose bricks and stones and throw them in hopes of scaring away those rascally pandas.

a telephone lineman and weekend softball pitcher executes a hard lob of a brick. it does not hit its mark as the panda turns to gnaw another appendage(extremity). the brick strikes the panda on the ass. ouch. the panda approximates a yelp and turns to the throw's origin. she charges. the lineman is toting the fixins for spaghetti and salad home for his wife.

the lineman, considering his own bulk, decides to stand his ground. as the panda closes in on him the lineman smacks the panda with his canvas shopping bag. the heft of the jar of ragu and the oversize bottle of olive oil make for a blunt impact. both containers break. the panda suffers contusions and a few minor lacerations that only add to the black and white and red allover.

the lineman turns to run. the panda tackles him from behind. the lineman falls face-first to the ground. his nose, cheek and chin scrape across the bricks. the last thing he feels is the panda's hot breath and dripping saliva on the back of his neck.

you continue to alternately scream and adore lady victory.

still people stand in the square and across the street. frozen by these fuzzywuzzies breaking out of their roles.

with so many choices the pandas pause to select their prey. there is a cluster of people (5 or 6) nearby. the five pandas charge en masse. the pursuit leads them to the center of congress street.

¢

the pandas leave a path of absolute havoc. before long they are out of sight.

you ride atop lady victory's shoulders.

she hops easily down from her granite pedestal. sword and shield at the ready. for your protection.

a few burdened piles of gore represent the audience of your art. enthusiastically gnawed human limbs litter the pavement.

you exit the square, with lady victory beside you, the opposite direction the pandas wander and hope they don't plan to circle back.

you two lovebirds agree to have a drink in a nearby cellar bar. around the corner. through a black metal door and downstairs lies a bar.

if you look hard enough anywhere you'll find a bar.

the carnival is in town. the bar is filled with the employees.

you elbow up to the bar with this lady of stature. she has to duck. sit down even. to avoid scraping her headdress on the low ceiling. and creating a sparky rain.

the statue sits beside you at the bar.

the bartender. a girl with a colorful wit. flirts with the statue. the bartender give lady victory a bucket size long island ice tea. on the house. you order a rye and ginger.

around the corner of the bar. beneath a television broadcasting major indoor lacrosse a man leans on the bar. he is drinking something straight. his suit is torn and covered in blood.

you say to the bartender: what happened to that guy?

bartender: he got in a fight over a pool game he lost.

you shoulda seen the other guy.

you: i bet

bartender: no. really you shoulda seen him. some kinda carny freak
dressed up in a furry costume like it was going out of style

you: yeah?

bartender: in fact. he's over there playing pool with his buddies still.

lady victory looks over. you look past the bloodsoaked man to the active
pooltables for the first time.

you see four pandas playing a game of doubles. at another table are two clowns
doing trick shots. it's like a competition of spectacles. the pandas drinking.
sinking a couple balls. missing a bank shot and the next one comes up to shoot
and you cant tell the difference.

the statue takes a couple gulps. you drain a small glass of water. taking the
bamboo earlier into consideration. then you give your rye and ginger a generous
draft.

lady victory: i think i'll run for mayor

¢

16

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for you i stand on stone steps
and look the direction
opposite the attraction
(exhibition)

look the other way
look to the hills

so i wait for you to come
round a mountain i cant see
 to see your face
materialize from stone
 from the live earth
guided by a man
 called a sculptor

for you i wait for immutable
stone to change. to grow
 large in your likeness.

to burst with lines
 cried by a chisel

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¢

the night birds & the day
birds mingle

dawn on a small maine lake.
where what i believe in
most strongly is a canoe.

the surface of the water
is placid & silky with fog
& hints of morning.
[calm & silky]

the breeze is slight
& sifting in the fog.

¢

a loon's call

i want to call it mine

i'm not that eloquent

try as i may
shaping my mouth
to the tone
i cannot
assume the loon's call
entirely

i can play
from my hand
of melody
(of melancholy)

i emit a different
garbled clarity
holler
(i shouldn't say yawp)

i try other
whistled calls

attain with them
at least sound
from my mouth

(the needy yap of my youth)

but i speak
as speakers shall

i cry
 to mourn
 to long
(to yearn)
 to be a loon
on a lake

but that wasn't the original
 request

i want to give things away

by way of a call

i want to call it mine
to take
 in order to give
or
 just to say

like sound carries
 across water

but a lonely sound

a loon's call
a nearly pastoral voice

that crosses
 &
 comes back
with an echo
 a formless noise
reflection
 ricochet
return
 as it echoes forth

turning upon itself
 chasing its tail

across water

sound carries

& forms itself

to repeat

a loon's call

i am almost that eloquent

paddling a canoe

¢

17

in another circle

¢

a daunting young lad behind the wheel of a buick pulls into a white gravel driveway. the home of a curlyheaded girl.

there are two jeeps and a minivan in sight. one jeep sticking out of the garage. the other two vehicles occupy their customary spots. he parks in the area left free for visitors.

he gets out of his car and walks through the crunch of white gravel to a set of landscaped steps. he descends.

he raps on the front door of the house. the knock is a formality.

as he enters he finds the curlyheaded girl's younger siblings and father playing video games.

father: how the hell are you?

driver: alright. you still losin?

father: fuck you. you wanna beer?

driver: thanks

father: you know where the fridge is

driver: you want one?

father: if you insist

the kids orbit asking preposterous questions. hiding shyly barely in the next room. showing their newest toys. shaking the controller to remind dad he's in the middle of a game.

there are a lot of kids.

the driver leaves a beer with pater. pops his own beer and goes upstairs.

father: she's upstairs getting ready. go on up

there are two bedrooms upstairs. he turns left through the first door. the room is a wreck. there is an album playing on the stereo. there is no one in the room.

the driver goes through a door into the walk-in closet/hallway that connects the two bedrooms and the bathroom.

the driver hears the shower. he turns into an open doorway. the bathroom.

-hello

from the shower: who is it?

-it's me

out of respect or goofiness the driver speaks to the half-fogged mirror.

in the mirror he sees the shower curtain open.

-i'm sorry. i'm still in the shower

-i see that

the curlyheaded girl sticks her wet head out of the shower. she drops something that thuds on the floor of the tub.

-shit

she is a beautiful girl. she allows the driver to see her glistening lithe wet self in the mirror.

he smiles.

he turns. she disappears to pick up the shampoo bottle. he walks toward the opening in the curtain. she reappears as he arrives.

-hi

-howdy

he sips his beer.

she stands before him.
nude. damp.

she takes the beer. gets his hand wet. she takes a good gulp.

-he won't give me beer

the driver laughs and takes the beer from her outstretched hand. he takes a drink. leans to kiss her.

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she puts her wet hand
on his cheek and kisses
him warmly.

he touches. first her
shoulder. then her side.
stomach. his hand sliding
easily on her wet form
to her breast.

he leans from the kiss
and nibbles her nipple.

it is a pert and vigorous salute.

curlyheadedgirl: Mmmm

he turns from the bathroom
and goes to sit on her bed.

she dresses and curses her sister for making off with the glow in the dark chuck
taylors. she wears the red ones instead.

they make it out of the house and hop into the buick.

he drives dark winding byways to town.
the carnival is on.

in a nearby parking lot lie the campers and RVs of the carnies. also a semi trailer
that houses the elephants. the driver finds a spot.

he walks to the passenger side. the curlyheaded girl pulls him to her. they lean
against the car in the next spot and make out for a time.

as they walk toward the fair the elephants are mulling about the parking lot.

the keeper carries a quirt and chain smokes

it's amazing the elephants listen to him.

the driver and the curlyheaded girl approach the elephants.
they caress the rough grey hides of the elephants.

elephants are curious.

the driver ends up with elephant snot on his shoe. and a new picture (of elephants at night) in his head.

they walk to the harshly lit fairground and begin their rounds. they shoot waterguns and eat cotton candy. ride rides and nosh funnel cake.

the curlyheaded girl kisses powdered sugar from the driver's lips.

at the dunking booth the curlyheaded girl sinks the high school principal three times.

they ride the tiltowhirl.
and survive.

as they wander the grounds they stumble upon a bar. you can find a bar anywhere if you look hard enough.

the bartender does not hesitate to serve them. carnies, floozies and similar luses and troublemakers occupy the bar.

the tiltowhirl operator comes in behind them.

the bartender sets up two doubles of jameson and is putting the bottle back on the shelf by the time the tiltowhirl operator makes it from the door to the bar.

tiltowhirl operator: hey keith

keith: how's business?

tiltowhirl operator: bout like yours. [he looks down the bar]

keith also looks down the bar. a man has placed an empty pint glass on the bar and gently taps his fingers on the bar keeping time to the frampton tune that abuses the jukebox and their ears.

the driver and the girl with the curls are seated just left of the center of the bar.

keith walks to the man with the empty glass who is further left of the center of the bar.

keith: hey Barnaby. another?

Barnaby: sure thing. who let in the youngsters?

keith: who cares. if somebody wants a drink he should have it.

Barnaby: you are right where you belong

keith: you got it shithead

keith deposits the full cold beer glass on the bar and goes to do his duty at the other end of the bar.

keith: [bellows] never let the river run dry!

Barnaby: [to curlyheadedgirl and driver]: freak

curlyheadedgirl: i can't complain

driver: at least he's wearing pants

Barnaby: you kids with the show?

driver: naw. we just stumbled in here

Barnaby: me too

curlyheadedgirl: so who's the guy in the tux with no pants?

Barnaby: must be one of them carny bastards

the tiltowhirl operator finishes his first jameson in one gulp and nurses the second as a chaser. too much makeup and big hair trawls up to the bar next to him.

a man in a tuxedo and no pants wears a flower in his lapel. his beard and legs match for their curly locks.

he walks, sidles, prances around the bar greeting acquaintances, handing out invitations.

at one table a retired clown insists on a contest with a beer. they drink. the man with no pants wins.

the old clown slaps him on the back and accepts an invitation.

the man with no pants walks up to the bar between Barnaby and the driver. keith brings a round.

the driver, the curlyheaded girl, Barnaby and the man with no pants clink their glasses and drink a toast to the pink panther.

pan: i guess you have one already?

Barnaby: yep

pan: what about you two? in the mood for a drive this evening?

curlyheadedgirl: what?

pan: a drive

curlyheadedgirl: drive where?

pan: a party

curlyheadedgirl: tonight?

pan: yes

pan hands an invitation to the driver.

driver: thanks. will you be there?

pan: i guess i'm hosting the party. the directions are on the invitation
curlyheadedgirl: here?
pan: what?
curlyheadedgirl: here?
pan: where?
curlyheadedgirl: the directions
pan: yes

their glasses are empty and the man with no pants is gone.

Barnaby: i guess i'll see you there
driver: guess so
Barnaby: i gotta find Al
curlyheadedgirl: see you tonight
Barnaby: & ride the tiltowhirl

Barnaby leaves his empty pint on the bar and waves to keith as he wanders out the door oblivious to the driver and the girl with the curls' farewells.

keith brings two fresh drinks.

keith: on Barn's tab. enjoy
curlyheadedgirl: thank you. can i have a straw?
keith: umm...
curlyheadedgirl: bendy if you got em

keith walks away mumbling about sissy sticks. he ignores them until they finish their drinks and leave.

they enjoy the attractions. say hello to friends out at the fair.

the curlyheaded girl says hello to her best friend. the young lady selling beer and cotton candy. they score some free cotton candy and take a few rides before they make their way to the parking lot and the buick.

the girl with the curls pushes the driver against the passenger door of the buick and sticks her tongue in his mouth. she promises him a good time later.

he opens her door and closes it behind her. gets in and starts the buick.

the cassette in the stereo starts in where it left off.

driver: i guess we should get going
curlyheadedgirl: guess so

the driver guides the buick out of the parking lot. the girl with the curls examines the directions.

curlyheadedgirl: highway X? where the fuck is that?

driver: out 32 past the Beacon

curlyheadedgirl: shit. do we need our passports?

they follow the directions. the buick wends its way down dark winding byways. this road to that. past the Beacon. the driver slows but passes the tavern.

they turn down highway X. past dark hulks of farm outbuildings and nodding pastures.

the album keeps repeating. relentless.

they reach the final turn on their directions. longfox road. they turn down longfox road. only a few hundred yards into the road the headlights of the buick show a barricade and a 'road closed' sign barring their way.

-you think this is the right one?

-what's it say on the directions?

-longfox road

-this must be it. it think there's enough space on this side.

the driver inches the buick past the barricade onto the surface of the gravel road. as they drive small stones plink on the quarterpanels of the buick. flipped from the road by the wheels' forward motion.

-i guess a closed road's a good place for a party

-might keep cops and other undesirables at bay

the driver is in control of the buick.

the condition of the road deteriorates as they drive. the driver is forced to slow down. the girl with the curls rolls something to smoke. also in her possession is a pint of whiskey in her pocket.

they smoke and drive.

-seems pretty far

-we're not going very fast

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¢

they reach the end of longfox road. or at least as far as the car will go. there is a place to turn around or park your car.

also a river. spanned by what used to be a bridge. tattered pillars sticking out of the water. connected by invisible lines of forgotten bridge building.

bridges are for crossing.

tumbled and fallen down. the bridge reflects what once was ground.

the driver and the curls with the girl are given incorrect directions. or the roads don't lead them where they were going. the snipe hunt.

they crouch as if at the edge of water.

it is a moonless night. the only light is the stars and pieces of lures or mica. they glew. like phosphorescent algae or minnows. lit either by reflection or light produced by imbalanced chemical equations.

tiny specks to match the stellar specks and smudges of light torn from far off stars.

they approach what they perceive to be the bank. as they look down to the surface of the river they both see a drop-off to the actual edge of the water. the drop-off is sevral feet high and looks hardly navigable.

the driver and the curlyheaded girl are entranced by glowing specks of heaven and earth and puzzled by this unexpected precipice before them.

-how the fuck are we supposed to get down there?

silence takes hold.

their hands touch barely as each reviews the route that took them there and where's the wrong turn and what could have been forgotten?

these thoughts pass as quickly as they are noticed.

they crouch as if at the edge of water.

mulling their next move and the fact thy didn't get where they thought the directions were taking them.

the curlyheaded girl twists the lid from the whiskey in her ass pocket and takes a drink. hands it to the driver. they drink. kiss. put the bottle away and look at the drop-off again.

enamored by the scene.

the girl with the curls, having returned the bottle to her warm soft flank, inhales. looks at the driver. exhales.

she reaches gingerly toward the precipice. fingers outstretched to pass as the tips of an arm's length. she reaches.

as her hand reaches the plane of the gravel bank her feet occupy ten thousand wrinkles overrun the surface of the water and the entire illusion of a scene is revealed and disappears and they are made privy to the truth of the sights before them.

the first scene drops off and shatters. they see stars reflected from above in the water. interrupted by wind and meandering current of ripples.

the curlyheaded girl's fingers get wet.

the remains of the bridge remain. the unidentified scraps of glowing particles remain. the stars remain.

they both laugh at this trickery. all thoughts of the party and the invitation subside.

the girl with the curls provides whiskey again.

they lean back from their crouches to sit. pass the bottle and smile.

the curlyheaded girl takes off her shirt. stands and lets her pants slide to her ankles. she steps out of each leg. the driver watches as she stands before him in bra and panties. she removes each in turn. stands naked as a snake for his eyes in the dark. the white of her skin like marble in the starlight.

he watches her nude form before him.

now, shed of all strings, threads, she stands and wades into the water.

it is a little chilly.

if the light was greater he would see the goosebumps and her nipples abruptly harden.

but in this light her nipples only shine like her eyes.

the girl with the curls. like a statue. stands from the water and beckons to him with the poise and pose of her inviting form.

the driver stands to shed his threads. jeans and t-shirt left to the gravel bank. shoes and socks abandoned.

he wades to his knees and dives.

they swim.

the erstwhile pillars serve as milemarkers.

they swim. at distances the only visible sign of a lover in the dark is a face. illuminated barely by what light is provided. the sounds of breathing and limbs breaking the surface of the water.

they swim to a pillar. used as support for their tired legs. they grab hold of each other and keep the soft current and depths from making a claim on their love.

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18

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Sarah: theodore

TR: Sarah (he whispers. else the cake might fall. like quietly struggling to remember a dream you think might have significance. the ones you never talk about. that don't materialize fully. too much fragile to try. but hold a certain significance. like the voice of a ghost or an otherwise silent radio. too far from somewhere to pick up more than static)

Sarah: theodore. has it been years? decades? a century?

TR: Sarah. does it matter? we're here. where there's no time. oh Sarah

Sarah: won't you sit with us. the boy insists on being outdoors just as much as he can

TR: how is the house?

Sarah: still growing. everchanging. large. the rooms we use at least don't change often. the boy relishes some quiet corners. nooks. stairways. other parts of the house he refuses even to go near. most of all he likes to be out here with that dog

TR: she seems a good one

Sarah: yes. she's his

the others have dispersed through the ambling garden. they play with this young Oscar as he runs by.

and Oscar. our Oscar. the one with the horse and the lieutenant and the injun. as out of sorts as he is with encountering his younger self. or a version of it. Oscar plays with Oscar the most. the lieutenant's smelling flowers and wiping his boots on the backs of his pant legs. the injun is mentally cataloging the plants for medical and recreational uses. he can see coming here to borrow from the garden. already the plan's forming. he'll bring other plants. the hard to find. the vilified. the confused flowers with forgotten uses. those he'll plant here. to share with Sarah. a safe haven for botanicals. a place where they'll be tended with careful hands. to flourish. a conversation he won't have to have with Sarah.

a mexican girl. Sarah's house girl. brings tea to the veranda. interrupting play and musing. not teddy's enamored stare. or the dust on Oscar's boots.

¢

¢

the girl rings on a triangle to call our adventurers to tea.

Oscar fills a paper with tobacco. rolls it with one hand. because of course he can do that.
have to have a hand free for the reigns or his pistol.

teddy sees he better keep this short. else he'll never leave. he cant disappoint Mark. more
like he cant resist a go at competition with Mark. & Sarah's so alluring. has been and will
be. and parting's nothing he wants to have to do.

the injun takes his tea with milk and two lumps.

the lieutenant's first to tea. his politeness rivals his marksmanship.

the injun is waylaid for a few moments by a curious plant. he picks a flower for his pipe.

Oscar & Oscar & Laika have a race. Oscar, the younger, does not fall to tear his knee up
on unforgiving stones. Laika gets there first. it's the way she does things. barking from the
beginning. even when she doubles back to wag her tail at the lagging injun.

Sarah: please sit down

lieutenant: thank you kindly ma'am

and there's a large table on the paving stones. each takes a seat. the table was not there
when they arrived. it is too large for the girl to carry. it is the same mystery as the rest of
the house.

the lieutenant asks the injun about the plants he took note of in the garden. Sarah and
the injun alternate in answers.

Sarah: Nita. the gentleman will need a glass of milk. also one for the boy

she's talking about Oscar without his request. she answers his need.

when the girl has poured the tea she disappears. work to be done i'm sure.

Sarah: Nita. i don't guess the gentlemen will be staying for supper. they're
anxious to be on their way

girl/Nita: yes miss Sarah

seems like Sarah's talking to the air.
same place Nita's voice comes from.

¢

¢

they have their tea and friendly pastries. it is not a meal. that's for their own doing.

Oscar (both of him) enjoys his milk.

the injun takes his tea with two lumps. the lieutenant employs his pinky.

our dear sweet teddy forgets his tea as he watches Sarah and listens to her quiet tones.

Sarah: theodore. you haven't touched your tea

TR: oh. my apologies Sarah (slurp and he wipes the tea from his generous
moustache)

good to the last drop

(such zealous moustachery as you've never seen. full. overwhelming. it's got a mind of its own. an ecosystem of its own. an atmosphere of the dust of riding and heavy breaths. a hardy man with a hearty moustache. inhabited by little monkeys and their friends. a tropical island and a bob ross landscape. flying squirrels. and bats to kill the mosquitoes)

Sarah: where are you gentlemen bound?

TR: i've got an appointment with Mark and these lads have another bridge to cross. but i believe i have convinced them to accompany me as far as the gypsies

from somewhere in the house the sounds of construction sneak out to the veranda. saws & hammers & planes at work. knocks & chatters & grunts. the squeak of boards knocked into a tight fit.

Sarah: they do have joyful gatherings

TR: that they do

Sarah: you young men will surely enjoy the experience

lieutenant: yes ma'am. we hope to (tie one on)

Oscar: [the younger] gosh mister thanks for takin care of my dog

Oscar: no problem kid

Oscar: [the younger] i wanna be like you when i grow up

Oscar: you just might if you're not careful

injun: him good dog

Oscar: [the younger] she's a girl

Laika: bark

TR: we should be going

lieutenant: i guess we should

Sarah: theodore. you must come visit me

TR: yes. Sarah. i will

Sarah: and you young men should come back too

¢

¢

to get to the party. the one we've been talking about. from this quiet land of night cant take long for our men on horseback. our teddy's been on this jaunt because it takes him closer to the party. which somehow seems to be nearly the same location as Sarah's house. which is. & is not. in this quiet land of night. have to cross water to get there.

they ride in circles. camp out another night. if you can call it that. there's no distinguishing time in this quiet land of night. no difference between today and tomorrow. night and tomorrow. you ride awhile and decide to camp and that designates another day's passing. another measured passing with no frame of reference. no sun rising or setting. no sun rise or set. they play tunes around the campfire.

every time teddy sees Sarah the parting's hard. like separating yolks and whites. delicate. like baking a cake.

¢

¢

TR, injun, Oscar, lieutenant ride their horses awhile longer.
they reach a fork. TR says he's going to a party.

TR: you should come along. take a little rest after this ride

the men discuss it. their horses scuff their feet in the dry roadbed

there's little better than a party.

so our wholesome crew sticks to the same side
of the fork in the road. onward. to a party
teddy's attending.

¢

19

yet another interlude:

Laika

¢

funereal bowsprit. does the current
plumb that deep. was Laika felt that
strongly. she lived so short. did she
continue on. broke from her vessel.
out of the lamp. the cat let out of
the bag.

then free of her metal shell. the
final point realized. needless
inorganic weight.

no thoughts need be kept in her canine
mind of hunger. the deep down code of
breathing could finally be ignored.

she opened her lungs to the void.

the matters of matter & physics &
necessary implosion we'll leave
behind here. beloved science thrown
to the ratrace. much less wayside.

gone by.

her jaws hung wide. in awe. disbelief.
she'd been flung first by slavish men
in a tin can from the kremlin's steps
up. up. and she was the first living
breathing beast.

flung now or freed. slipped easily
from a weird exoskeleton (most appear
so). stepped. fetched into the vacuum.
the open of space. this shell. carapace
fell. flung to burn in an uninviting
atmosphere.

and she in her
freedom. thought
(and less than that).
howled.

¢

¢

the cold calculation of instrumentation
kept her in cage or capsule. thrust into
the void in three stages. ninehundredthirtyseven
miles up. (moscow to berlin)

space capsule. a dose of this world.
from this world. out of the outer
atmosphere. long notes. whole notes.
with nothing to carry them through space.
no means of being heard for that dog's
howl.

in the vacuum. absence. of objects.
matter. to reflect waves of sound.

but this interstellar beast.
wanderer of the space between.
the nothing that makes up the universe.

a dog breathing nothing exhales nothing.
her voice with no reflection accrues the
interest and qualities of light.

it is heard as she approaches.

she follows closely.
speed, linear scale of time
unknown.

that wide held mouth's call persists.

¢

ç

it cant be said she had a
rachetty little ass and a
skirt all the boys liked
to chase. a shade in other ways.
she moved like the faint
distinction of colors in
the sky.

an orbital albatross throughout
an expanding fluid temporal
depiction.

canis. astral genus
of an openended landscape. Laika
a fledgling member. out of the
nest.

she caught a scent. struck a warm
track. the natural thing. she
followed the trail around imposing
stellar organizations to its source.

ç

¢

whether euthanasia or starvation
were stated. released. a week.
seven of the hundredeightytwo days.
each orbit. a hundredtwo minutes.
the second agent of man. machined.
handbuilt. ferried out of the atmosphere
in stages to circle the earth.
cyclical consternation.

and the first living breathing
creature. a barker. biological
observations transmitted from
the ring described around the
earth. (we all fall down) across
a now-laden sky.

bowtie and tophat signs
of that celestial circus
enmeshed in orbit. in
rings. in unprecedented
sideshow. barked told
sold woven through the
stellar joyride of man-
made machine and man's
best friend.

the gambit there still lies in
belief. is the ringmaster's
rote or spontaneous ditty. his
bark. her call. the whole truth.
the way things really happened.

Laika's heart-rate. respiration.
biological observations. a week's
worth of reportage. taken down
in a scientific shorthand of
peaks and valleys. faded those
seven days. at the close no
weekend holiday.

¢

¢

ivan or yuri or kasimir
kept count of those beats
tallied like meals on a
prison wall.

cellular history.
and one man. surely someone.
kept the gravity of those
tally marks. those primitive
scratches in crumbling plaster
to heart.

ivan or yuri or kasimir
surely one. esteemed the
moment the switch was
flipped. button pressed.
final breath was drawn.

then like a family pet's
fatal communion with a
speeding fender or whitewall
or the last quiet gasp
in a porch shaded by an
elder tree.

Laika expired.
or transmuted. or escaped.
was freed of mechanical bonds.
of canine capsule.
zero gravity be damned.

Laika
proceeded.

with the actions.
(if you'll allow those steps)
of history's initial spacewalk.
a cyclical hunt that continues.
unhindered in the void.
leashless.

big game or smaller targets
pursued by this spacedog.
free to follow.

¢

¢

the coarse wintry night of space
feathered her fur with spacedust
and cosmic rays. she forced this
trail. kept up to its warmth. to
tree or bay quarry.

to prey on
what led her where.

wings. in another medium.
in an atmosphere. anyplace
else. would have been a
natural development.

but propulsion of that
variety. there. here in
space. would prove
useless.

so she went
without wings.
with no
noticeable means
of propulsion
past her gait.

a gait that far exceeded
any measured run within
the confines of earth. she
lit out across an expanse
of universe like
your neighbor's backyard.

¢

¢

thusly morning began or continued
Laika was free of her space capsule
released by time or necessity or myth

she climbed. for every direction in space
is up from the right angle. up & out
from an infinite point.

she climbed or descended
to the center of a changing
amorphous formation.
expanding by law and theory.

arithmetically impossible.
she traveled at a speed
that surpassed electricity
without time.

travel without time or measure.
distance. milemarkers and lightyears
ignored.

¢

¢

Laika. Laaaiiikkaaa...
across a fertile valley
packed to the rafters
with game and peril.
peril put to ease
by a dog.

she runs through tall grass.
across an airy hillside.
in response to the call
of a young boy. a boy whose
intent is love as that's
what boys with dogs
like Laika intend.

she leans into the light stride of her shoulders
to slow as she approaches the boy. she barks.

the boy crouches. he pets the dog
with rough strokes of enthusiasm.
Laika verily towers over him.
licks his face.

this countryside. her valley
is in full view from the hillside with the boy.
trees yawn in the wind.
throughout, animals pursue life.

Laika keeps tabs on the valley.
but it changes. peril appears
& migrates. lines & topography
are changing.

¢

ç

she persists. examining the posture
of landscape & unbridled star charts.

she rescues herself from a more likely demise
extracted from conscientious nourishment
in the bent of space. leaping a diminished rock
fence.

something there is that doesn't love a wall
that hurdles stone with a dog
& botanical denizens of a slightly
interrupted wilderness.

the wilds between
planets & systems & celestial curtains
the boy identifies as an expanded hunting ground
(if he carried a powder horn he kept it dry)

& the pursuit crossed its own path.
doubled back on itself. to repeat.
beginning taken for a finale
that repeats.

Laika. Laaiiiiikkaaaa...
trembling in the vacuum.
breathing the howl.
released
ç

20

¢

the driver is an orphan
he is unlike a modest mouse

after playing a lustily filed
menagerie of instruments
reed & brass & percussion
he strums a guitar
a nice acoustic ditty

he is not much of a singer
something between louis armstrong
& julia child

a gruff whiny black man
with lots of butter
like al jolson marries queen elizabeth the second:

i never loved anyone
i never loved anyone ...
as much as i love you

(it is a daring tune
 he picks his own bass line
the short guy with the upright bass
 slaps over it
the vibes softly pick up the slack)

i never loved anyone
i feel like a heel for saying it
as much as i love you
i feel like a heel for saying it
not because i'm mistaken
but cause i feel like a heel
 most anything i say

i could build a kiss
 on a dream
or a motel
 on a vacant lot

i could find a crys-
tal in a cave
or a fish
hid in your curls

(and yes the driver could stand
in a garden. & a curlyheadedgirl
up above preys upon a second floor balcony.
he doest climb a trellis or break with the east.
but it is a serenade)

if i ride beside you on an elephant
king or queen or lumberjack

lost among
this garden's green
(or subway crowds)

something had to happen

¢

the girl with the curls smiles does not cry
as is the case with love songs in public
(public love songs) aloud. the audience
a goodly percentage at least. is strongly
affected. accosted by the orphan/driver's song.
& where there is love within earshot

is evident

portrayed by couples doubly wooed by selves and song.

¢

21

¢
there's a ritual in everything
a circle to be turned
a pirouette
a spell
a casting
bees dance to give directions
tell a tale
& the way
to nectar
& to hurl hook worm & bobber
in an arcing motion
across water
plop. it sinks & the bobber
stands up for gravity
a concentric marker
on the surface of water
with a nibble
turns circular patterns
growing out from the center
a rippled designation
turn the reel
gather line in circles
gather circles
to cast again
¢
fishing.
verbing up the quarry
another way to prey
(pray?)
to make
a verb out of scaly prey. to turn scales
to be.
a verb.
fishing for compliments.
entice. bait. the hook.
catch.
a stringerfull.
Hooktied feathers. Painfully wrapped and painted
under dry light
fool the fish
at the crack of a whip.
¢

¢

Oscar, lieutenant, our teddy and the injun ride along stirring up dust to get them on their way.

they follow roads as teddy shows the way. like a charge on a cuban hill. cigar in hand. the ride is hardly rough.

teddy shows the way. they ride. a single file party. following the leader. they ride dark winding byways. dusty. dry.

on their way to a party we've already heard of. signposts like milemarkers like billboards.

a sign says: party!

teddy does not need the signs. he knows where to go. he's the one shows the way.

they reach, after a fur piece, a shrouded path. the low-hanging limbs force them to dismount. they lead their horses. hands to halters.

at their feet (and hooves) pins and needles from pines make for a soft red-brown carpet.

they come across a granite berm (embankment). the roadbed for a train. rails & ties & pellets of pigiron mixed in with the granite. they hang a right. walk their horses on the tracks. til they reach a trestle. a railroad bridge. nothing but space between the ties and the parallel guideposts of the rails. the horses are nervous and fenced-in as the injun, lieutenant and Oscar lead them to cross the water.

as long as it's dark below and the horses don't realize there's a fall it should be ok.

Algonquin, that cocky steed, quirkily prances across the bridge. like he's playing hopscotch on yesterday's sidewalk.

TR: this is the only way to get there. have to cross a bridge.

below the brook babbles a broken cadence.

Algonquin clomps in time.

¢

¢

to either side they barely see water. and the muffled foliage. hear a bird or six.

at the far side of the bridge. once they've crossed. are carbonite miner's lamps at the mouth of a cave. a tunnel through a hill. inside the carved stone. small natural passageways turn off and down on either side of the tracks. mostly they are clouded by debris thrown from the tracks.

the granite roadbed turns to sand and the ties are covered.
the horses' steps come silent as teddy's bootprints.
from above flitting bats broadcast high frequency echolocation.
a song that mingles with radio waves
and tells shapes in 3D maps of what objects sound like.
the bats swing precariously low and close to the horsemen's heads
devour flying insects that have an interest in horse and man.

a few places guano coats the ground and rails.
where overhead the bats hang around a place called home.

by the far end of the tunnel the rails are covered in sand.
obscured. neglect to the point of disappearance.

and posted at the mouth of the cave another pair of miner's lamps.
claim jumper's utilities.

the come back out into evening.
out of the cave. horses none the worse for darkness.

the others take teddy's lead and climb to the high shoulders of their nervy mounts.

hoofprints make more noise and they cut to the final path before they enter a large clearing from darkened woods. teddy points toward the congregation of mounts over yonder and he sallies off to meet up with Mark.

TR: i'll see you boys round of the fires later on. i got a date to keep

and he rides out on speaking to Oscar, lieutenant and injun as he gestures toward the lively circles of booze and beaten drums.

the injun rides to hobble his horse in the clearing. Oscar and the lieutenant find a hitching post and deposit their trusty beasts in the ample vault of sky and grass.

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the injun hears a call. a song
he's familiar with. one he plays
for the hunt. the drums
of a faroff circle.

that is his
draw and the direction he wanders

the lieutenant can smell whisky
& urges Oscar to follow his nose
there is a pit of whisky nearby
it preserves drunks
in its steamy depths.
it is thick with tourists from la brea

the injun finds a medium circle
there his redskin cohorts
of many geological persuasions
sing a similar jaguar.
circled shamans that grant
an open chair (buffalo hide)
to the new arrival.

the injun takes note
of drums he's met
in this quiet land of night.

¢

¢

Oscar and the lieutenant run into their
old friend whisky. at this party
any friend of his is a friend of theirs.
like they're buying the drinks

rather than lean on a bar (wagon)
to man the spittoon they roll smokes
and enter the fray of a beckoning blaze
men who might get drunk enough
to schuck their boots.
(get caught with their boots off)

and who homes in but our friend pan.
the guy without tuxedo pants

pan: welcome to the party gentlemen

lieutenant: were we sposeto dress up?

Oscar: thanks partner

lieutenant: thank you

Oscar: are you the welcome wagon?

lieutenant: i never seen a gypsy looked like you

pan: i'm a co-host. the circumstantial master of ceremonies

¢

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and everyone seems to have arrived.
the gang's all here. this is no shootout
at the OK corral. no dodge city. no hell's
kitchen. no watts. no tianamen. no berlin
wall. no bay of pigs.

everyone present is intent on the same
purpose. same aim. a burgeoning party
with all the trimmings.

no that there arent dangerous
or volatile elements present. there
are a couple drunk sons of bitches with shotguns
for fuck's sake.

the driver takes a liking
to his particular circle's beat.
more interesting and layered than his previous
circle. the center's a fire and the statue's
beside him.

but the guns and knives and angry vikings
have set aside their horns
turned their helmets
over to drink from.

troublemakers beware
men like these are short on patience
and long on painful brawn.

the pony express riders are nervous
the boss cant find out.
they have the jitters and keep looking
for their saddlebags.

the gypsies have been explosive
from time before the beginning.
they were tilting casks of wine
before the fires were lit.

when people say they'll share
& do
for nothing other than the fact
it's a party
& everything's brimming.

¢

22

¢

the girl with the curls stands on a hill.
the one she's roamed to in the company
of the young lady. the hill overlooks
the whole scene of water & skeetshooters
and fortified partygoers.

the girl with the curls stands on a hill.
beside her is the young lady with the daisy.
this is the same hill, by the by, the train
tunnel burrows asunder.

the hill is thin
with trees. like the picnic area
at a state park. sans tables and barbecue pits.

the curlyheadedgirl sports a daisy
behind her ear. the young lady gave
her last loose daisy to hoagy carmichael
for a brave rendition of stardust.
she has her crown
& necklace left
as flower power.

they have vantage enough. when they reach
the peak. as they dangle their feet from rocks
to see the party's entire complement.
a torrent of drunken songs mingle & drift
up the hill to their cunning ears. the solution
creates an intimation, hint, blueprint
of a convoluted orchestra. a single tune
out of a breakneck bushel.

¢

¢

the girls. curlyheaded and daisy. hear a sound
from the other side of the hill. behind them.
& curiosity gets to them. about face.
& they descend the rugged alternate face
of the hill.

down down down.
to the watering hole called a stream.
& down. down below.
again with the talking fish.

fish: good evening ladies
curlyheadedgirl: hello mr. remedy
fish: i see you landlubbers are still at it
young lady: i see you've kept out of the frying pan
fish: (sings) i'm a lumberjack....
young lady: yeah yeah yeah... what have you seen?
fish: statues, bridges, a goldfish, a man in hipwaders...
and you young ladies?
young lady: circles, fire, elephants
curlyheadedgirl: men with guns, a girl with flowers, a fish that talks
young lady: no fisherman, no goldfish
fish: you missed the crossdressing yaks i'm sure

-umm....

fish: i've seen other things you did that you didn't see. things that
happened in another circle
curlyheadedgirl: like what?
fish: i saw you descend a precipice
young lady: what?
fish: and i saw you lie in wait
curlyheadedgirl: what do you mean?
young lady: yeah
fish: i saw what didn't happen. it happened to you. but not to you. not
in this circle. a night like this. you came upon a bridge that
wasn't there
young lady: as usual you arent making any sense
fish: like fishing with dynamite

¢

¢

lapping at the surface of the water a canoe approaches the congregation of fish and girls.

when the canoe is near enough to see. in the dim two characters are revealed paddling.

at the stern is the travel writer (you can tell by his shoes) and in front is Michael Cadman. these two appear to be traveling somewhere. they are keeping up appearances.

fish: Michael. i wondered when i'd see you

Michael Cadman: how are you mr. remedy?

fish: fine fine & yourselves?

Michael Cadman: as well as can be expected

travel writer: catching up on our fishing

fish: oh dear

Michael Cadman: we've got our limit of talking fish

travel writer: Michael likes his dynamite

Michael Cadman: i caught a goldfish. we're going to take it home and murder it with a bowl

the travel writer opens a beer. the canoe drifts closer to shore.

travel writer: would you ladies like a schlitz?

by now their goblets are dry.

both: sure

they walk on the gravel bar. the travel writer hands them cans from the cooler. this serves as an introduction.

curlyheadedgirl: thank you

Michael Cadman: you're welcome

young lady: thanks

travel writer: no problem. there's plenty where that came from

the girls guzzle. they return their empties to the canoe. the travel writer proffers another pair.

travel writer: that was impressive

fish: yes. but they've had practice

young lady: a girl gets thirsty with all this water around

Michael Cadman: i wouldnt advise operating any heavy machinery

the fish laughs and dives to take a lap to the other bank and back. he jumps out of the water and flaps his tail.

the girls drink. Michael and the travel writer also drink. they remain in the canoe. the girls stand on gravel.

travel writer: whatchya think Michael? should we go?

fish: where ya headed?

Michael Cadman: downstream

curlyheadedgirl: hey mister can a girl get a ride round here?

travel writer: how far ya goin?

young lady: just around the bend

travel writer: we can make room

Michael Cadman: it's not far

curlyheadedgirl: as far as you want to take us

the canoe is sturdy and seaworthy. there are no leaks. the girls sit between the cooler and Michael Cadman on cushions and bedrolls. it is luxurious. the girls are cleopatras pushed up the nile by slaves. or lovers in the wet streets of venice escorted by a gondolier and his friend with the violin.

Michael Cadman: see you next time mr. remedy

fish: have a safe crossing

all: goodbye

& the fish tailwalks for the show of it and dives to swim off to stir up trouble.

Michael and the travel writer shove off with their paddles.

¢

¢

they ride downstream. a clear course.
Michael and the travel writer paddle corrections.
the girls recline & drink. enjoy the view.
sky & stars & dark water & treelined banks.

on their way. a short ride. gently.

curlyheadedgirl: what brings you gents to these waters?
Michael Cadman: buried treasure
travel writer: for the waters. i hear they're good for the health
young lady: have you seen the elephants?
curlyheadedgirl: or teddy?
travel writer: no. but we did have to repel boarders.
bopped the little people with paddles
Michael Cadman: elephants?
young lady: there's a party
Michael Cadman: a party!
travel writer: is that what this is all about?
curlyheadedgirl: so it would seem
Michael Cadman: we should do kegstands in the canoe

-umm...

merrily.merrily.merrily.

they ship their paddles. the travel writer and Michael Cadman.

the girls are spectators. the course is in the hands of the water.

¢

¢

-let's drift
-if you insist
-where'd you put the pipe?
-you had it last
-i thought you did
-do you at least know where the lighter went?
-yes. i have one in the pocket of my fishing vest
-aha!
-what?
-i've found it
-what?
-the pipe
-ah bravo. have you packed it?
-have you? i just found it
-where's what to pack it with?
-here with the bait
-you haven't mixed them up have you
-well let me check.

 this is a styrofoam
 container of canadian nightcrawlers. and this
 is a cylinder made of wire mesh that seems
 to be chirping. by god i think it's crickets.
-fuck you
-what are we smoking again? insects? stink bait?
-shut up and pack the bowl
-done
¢

¢
sparks fly.

they smoke as if in a circle.
the pipe is the fire or statue
at the center.

travel writer: ya know the first postage stamps appeared in 1847
Michael Cadman: postage makes an epistle(missive) valid
travel writer: ben franklin and george washington
curlyheadedgirl: are living persons still forbidden?
young lady: wasnt ben franklin the postmastergeneral?
Michael Cadman: did he create electricity?
travel writer: i think some brit got knighted for coming up with postage
stamps
curlyheadedgirl: when did he have the idea?
travel writer: just a few years before they spread here. they were called
labels and postmarks were stamps
young lady: i guess that didn't stick
curlyheadedgirl: only 150 years. that doesnt seem long enough
Michael Cadman: it's a well-kept secret that buffalo used stamps as early as the
4th century BC
travel writer: evolution's been around just as long
young lady: another brit
curlyheadedgirl: at least they use stamps in kansas

they pass to make a rotation. the pipe is cashed and Michael and the travel writer
have a camel.

¢

¢

in the bed of the canoe. folded. damp from a hard day's use. a pair of green hipwaders. the travel writer's shoes are dry.

they continue. pick up their paddles. drip dried. fore & aft. & begin to row the boat. gently downstream. they follow the flow of the current. all four of them. the girls languish in the cushioned comfort.

like a drifting bed.

the pellucid shallows reveal underwater wildlife. darting flashing and sucking up the current. rapids. clarity. transparency. glassy. fluid.

fish.

Michael makes a noise that sounds like a yearn. he'd rather be fishing.

travel writer: you still wanting to fish?
Michael Cadman: why stop?

they get where they're going. the canoe glides toward the leftern bank. rocks scrape the bottom of the boat.

curlyheadedgirl: i guess this is our stop
young lady: looks like the one

it is familiar. near they place they first met the talking fish.

where a broken bridge once stood.

Michael Cadman: i guess we'll see you later
travel writer: there's a place not too far off to tether up these horses. if i can get Michael to get out of the water. we'll see you around.
curlyheadedgirl: good luck
young lady: be careful with that dynamite

Michael and the travel writer push themselves back into the channel.

the young lady and curlyheadedgirl home in on the nearest bonfire to recharge their empty helmets.

¢

23

¢

one of my infirmities revealed

wired in a series

christmas lights are as ambiguous as my love life

what else does this reflect?

can you see in the night sky reflected on a calm lake

something more that what is there?

and what sound is to be heard

by dark or mist

reflected & repeated

echoed under the covers

into a windblown song

or call

by way of the soviet space program

duct tape

a whistled tune

or repeated album

& text printed bold to signify a yell

a loon's cry

or a dog's long howl

¢

¢

circles grow & drift & shrink
the outlying tents begin to fill with wornout
partygoers. gypsies in wagons. travelers
in tents. no one brought a cabin.

some concoctions reach the depths
of their vats. others are kept filled.
fruits & nectars & libations.

the numbers
of people present & accounted-for reduce.
& circles migrate & merge toward the middle.
attrition to time & the opposite of sobriety.
the prevailing popular sentiment.

no money
changes hands. or deals are made. nothing
of any sort beyond circles & song & drink take place.

though the vikings are still with their grog.
they stoke a fire in an outer circle.
they sing norse sagas & toast former heroes
& victories to come.

colors of the vikings' equals shine
as the evening wears on.
(the evening wore on)
& the vikings see where they can wander.
what circles rival their own.
who they should respect as warrior kings.

no longboats will burn (sturm und drang)
but the pyre grows in the circles' center.
the innermost ring lit by flame.

& a few smaller fires mark their light.
turn their tunes to the night.

¢

¢

were this a complex
multi-cd video roleplaying game or a trilogy of very long movies everyone would
soon ante up to find out they were gathered together to fraternally familiarly
partake in a quest. & soon they'd form a plan and travel further and level up.
toward a common goal. (kinda like communism)

this may be a circle that contains them all. with a
communal center & a coincidental conjunction of orbits. syzygy. circles with the
same center. alignment.

or a congregation.
disciples or pilgrims or laity with a vengeance. a crass exhibition of faith in the
inexplicable. & beginnings. a fountain in a rustic garden. & someone said the
great god pan is dead.

comes down to a circle around a fire
at a party. comes down to love.
a tenuous circumnavigation. (bridges
are for crossing) relentless.

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Al & his gypsy woman, rebecca, are seated on a log to take a breather from the heavy dancing on the prairie.

Al: them kids is pure motion

gypsywoman: all the energy in the world

Al: more'n i can think of

gypsywoman: more than you have?

Al: i can always call up the reserves

they've been dancing (&resting) since they got to the party. don't forget the drinking. both a familiar hand with the bottle. handy with the bottle.

Barnaby & jill. the cotton candied young lady. are all aflame dancing circles around the fire. occupe. occupied territory in an orbital war. neither free to follow any but the other. a match made at the fair.

they mix & mingle & reunite as their orbits take them in circles. around the fire.

gypsywoman: i saw some tractors over there in the dark

Al: you tryin to lead me off into the woods?

gypsywoman: you got it bub

Al: well. let's get goin

they are up from their rest. full of breath and they walk toward the dark. into the woods.

you know the rest.

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measure distance through time.
absence makes the heart.

every distance closed
by crossing bridges
to gather
within a circle

a sign says: Party!

the vikings migrate west. toward the center.
an elephant pulls a sledge that moves hoagy's
pie-ano. & a full selection of mixed vats
from the outer orbits. inward. closing.
drawn. gravitation. to the center.
in the spin of this quiet land of night.
other circles slide to the center.
as the remnants of the party congregate
for a few more rounds.

the musicians
who have the endurance to keep the reeds wet
tune their flutes & tether their kitestrings.
enough to justify a filled concert hall.
the orphan, hoagy, hopped up medicine men.

additionally
those whose part is in motion
whose role is motion
dance

one driver. one statue. a couple dozen
gypsies. a handful of young ladies and nymphs.
teddy. mark. nikola. Barnaby. no Al.
Oscar. the lieutenant. (cask of whisky apiece)
the injun. (in the company of drummers)
one travel writer. Michael Cadman. uncle charly.
a dog named bosco. Algonquin. two elephants.
pan. & the curlyheadedgirl.

(not to mention
a sleuth of vikings & the odd crossdressing yak)

most dance.

less vikings, yaks
& elephants for fear of trampling mankind.
songs pass and conduct the audience

to their seats. the music continues
(relentless) the party seems to have turned
out well. all the circles make one.
the booze there is gets handed right to left.
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it could end here.

the way a party is what went on.
a gathering like a fountain.

with all the mermaids
& mermen.

peacocks and peahens.
doe & buck.

but Michael Cadman gets his hands on a squeezebox.
the travel writer's got his harmonica. Barnaby
a bucket of grog. the statue stands to circle
& driver & young ladies, even teddy and mark and tesla.
pan dances.

& the curlyheadedgirl with her skirt
for dancing.

orphan & injun & others tame the tune
& open the circuit. vikings polka like mohawks (iroquois)
in longhouses. bushmen on the lam.
a song is the reminder. the circle
keeps repeating. after itself. bridges are for crossing.
a relentless casting that doubles
as beginning, end, intersection, uncertainty,
control.

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morning is a time of color

doesn't come often in this quiet land of night.
only comes out on special occasions.
sunday best in a bowtie.

otherwise it's hard to tell what color things are
in this quiet land of night.

morning is a time of color
when what transpired the night before
came to pass. is revealed.
in color. there is a realistic absence

of technicolor

but all fish & grievances are brought to the table
from the livewell or net or ledger.
textbook or catalogue color.
film vs. video vs. light of day peeking over
the treeline as the sun cordially rises. to shed days
on the facts. on the morning after. the beginning
of the continuation of a party.

when coffee's passed before the first round gets poured.

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in the morning. in a morning. in my morning.

sleeping next to a campfire isn't half bad
if you don't mind the ash.

many a form has slumped to sleep beside a fire.

some, when first light falls, crawl to find the nearest shade.

it's a short day.
so when first light comes it's been long enough
for it to be almost time to get up.

to wake beside a fire sunk to barely coals.
covered in grey ash of time that shows for color
now in time of morning in this quiet land of night

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Barnaby and his young lady sneak off
to lie under a tree.

they stop on the way
at a wagon stacked full of blankets out.
by this time a drunken gypsy is barely manning
his post at the wagon handing blankets out.
most everyone has fallen to sleep.
but this man stubbornly stands by his wagon.

he's belligerent & unconsciously bitter.

man: what do you want?

Barnaby: we were hoping for a couple blankets

man: what's it worth to you?

jill: a place to sleep

man: don't sass me

Barnaby: i can offer you a drink

man: that'd be friendly of you (slosh says his helmet)

jill: can we have some blankets?

man: well alright. but i cant let you have more'n three. gotta have enough for
everybody.

Barnaby: not to argue but you have a couple hunnerd blankets on that wagon

man: that is argument. and i could just not give you any. cant let you leave
everyone out in the cold.

jill: just give us the blankets

man: i'll give em when i'm good and ready

Barnaby: you're not being very nice

man: i gotta job to do mister

whilst this is going on jill walks to a stack of blankets & takes four. she turns and
walks away.

Barnaby: well i guess i'll be seein ya

the man mumbles incomprehensibly and falls into a comfortable stupor. Barnaby
trots to catch up with jill.

jill: what an ass

Barnaby: i'm glad you got the blankets

jill: it was the only way we were going to get them

Barnaby: i figured if i moved to grab em he'd take that as an attack

jill: he wasn't going to get up

Barnaby and jill went up the hill to find a tree to lie under. they throw three blankets down for padding. the fourth is their tent. they lie back and look up at the spiraling shape in the tree branches. soft pine needles make for an agreeable bed.

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jefferson davis missed the party.

still fighting for his economic system he just doesnt have the time for even a hopping gypsy party.

once the music couldn't keep its lids up
and everyone sat around the fire. after some labored conversations. teddy & mark & nikola retire to their quite nearly luxurious tent. designed by nick for nights like these. futuristic and dripping with modern convenience. like running water. electric lights & extra beds. they invite Michael and the travel writer to sleep there. though teddy and Mark and the travel writer would like to see the curlyheadedgirl and some other young ladies invited. but there arent enough beds and it's poor form anyway to ask girls to come spend the night on such short notice. nick wants his bed to himself. he's visualising his next invention. a machine for making breakfast and martinis.

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Oscar and the lieutenant use their boots for pillows.
just cant keep a shine on them. they stretch out
their long dusty legs toward the fire to catch some
shuteye.

when they wake up. before they know it.
they'll be coaxed into spending another day
at the party. when in a world made of no time
you can stay as long as you like. at a party.

friend whisky assists their sleep. boots always
restless for stirrups or clomping through dust.

the injun drums up morning. plays it into light.
keeps at it past all other drummers.
invites the rise and thanks the sun.
he fills his baked clay pipe
with the flower plucked from Sarah's garden.
there's no one to pass it to.

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pan is nowhere to be found

pan sneaks, like the dark, away from the party in the dead of night while, it seems, every or almost every one of the party's participants are asleep, passed out, incapacitated, in the woods.

he glides through the woods. a migratory spark. he hops a shortcut. quite instantaneous. a quick game trail through this quiet land of night. under the arms of motionless trees. across a needled carpet. his flute is the song of a project, the song of a quick jaunt, an immediate return, like a commando raid or beer run.

he steps through the immaterial doors of the elephant house. his tune materializes and plays at bouncing off the architecture. the concrete structure returns echoes carved in stone.

the elephant house is lit by a pair of clip lamps anchored to bars. as doors, walls or structure.

the animals are alert. the elephants are glad to see pan. he turns his tune to lockpicking in time. like a safecracker, pan frees the animals.

the clip lamps snap off their bars and, like lanterns in a barn, they set hay, straw and house afire.

pan plays a turn called glee and flees.

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by the time the statue and driver make it to the wagonfull of cotton the drunk man has passed out and they fill their arms with blankets to walk to the woods.

driving a buick in circles around a statue.

the buick is parked. she's come to life.

the driver is beside her. they have changed circles. and chased themselves into the woods.

-you arent supposed to move

-something had to happen

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it is inadvisable to sleep next to an elephant.
if the elephant beside you rolls over
that's all she wrote.

as much as she has a tendency or a desire
to sleep with the elephants, it's happened before,
the girl with the curls does not follow
the elephants when they decide it's time
to lullaby. they do like to be sung to.

but the last batch of songs of the drowsy musicians
are soft and lulling experiments in sound.
they will suffice.

the young lady and the girl with the curls
raid the blanket boat and shamble off
to find what will make a fine piece of shade.
come morning. something they don't expect.

snooze as long as they can.
they know there's another day of this.
if you can call it a day. or night.

the curlyheaded girl and the young lady
lay the planks of their pallet
& curl up til after dawn.

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the goldfish spends the night in a minnow bucket.
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eventually a rooster's got to crow.
he'll be supper soon enough.

the injun pops some cactus buttons
& drums like silence.

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the statue is next to the driver. (a good place for her)
they are enamored. asleep.

the sun funnels
through cracks between the leaves
beams are seen to walk up into the trees.
solid timber. planks of light.
& colors come with morning
to show soft marble called skin
of a beautiful woman

asleep next to the driver.

the statue took you traveling.

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morning is a time of color

and oatmeal or other breakfast grain
and toast and eggs and dairy
cold glass of milk
bacon
fruit cocktail

morning is a crawl to consciousness
morning is ignoring the thump of the newspaper on the front lawn

the morning yawns
draws a deep breath tinted by dewy moisture

there are a lot of mornings that pass for endeavors

but in this travel to rendezvous with the gypsies
there comes no morning. until after.
in this quiet land of night morning is unknown
time is a cantrip that leaves no mark.

and with after comes morning
when the party has been had
or is having. begun.
and no count is kept on light

parties with a printed end time never fulfill their potential energy.
they are boulders or marbles that never roll to the base of the incline.

morning wears nice pants
a plaid pair. some study
in synthetic fiber.
and color.

a meeting of perpendicular lines.
with permanent press creases
to accommodate for the fact
morning couldn't find her shirt

and she's walking around barechested
strutting her plaid stuff
and no one's about to offer her the shirt off his back
and she's not asking

the outfit and the light are coordinated

she's looking for another bottle
and she's not sure these pants are hers
they fit in a way that proves they are not hers
but they might as well be
and the pants fit in a way that proves she likes them

the plaid pants swing low on the chariot of morning's hips
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