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WITH
UNIMAG
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ROOTS

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A note on the type: the Computer Modern family was designed by Donald Knuth. The fonts employed in this work are Computer Modern Serif, and for the headers, Computer Modern Sans Serif.

Author's Note

This book was written over the course of 11 weeks while attending the North Park Write-In. Friends of mine were in my life during the writing of it. (Thanks.)

This book was drafted in the spring of 2017 and edited to some extent over succeeding months. I have several other books, some like this. (Informed.)

This book is for the dead living and the living dead, intended as encouragement in love. (Dedicated.)

Some readers will find this book funny and full of jokes. Others will find it serious and sad. Your reaction, as you read it, will depend on what kind of reader you are.

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UCAYALI

I trusted you, and when you came to talk to me, you told me a lie. You told me what you said yesterday.

I'm very tall. I know that about myself. So when people tell me I'm short, I get kind of mad. I think this is a normal thing, the way everyone is. You want other people to see you how you see yourself, or maybe a little bit better. I've relied on the opinions of other people a lot over the years. I'm glad people know me better than I know myself. But overall, there has to be some continuity between my self-perception and the better perceptions of me which other people have.

When I was 6 years old, I had my tonsils removed. It was my decision. I paid the co-pay myself, out of quarters I picked up off the street and charmingly begged from a lot of people. My parents didn't want me to get the procedure done, but they said, "If he pays for it, it's his decision."

Krasnoyarsk is probably a place in Russia. It sounds like that would be where it is. I probably heard the word somewhere, associated with Russia. I think if I went there, I would be free from whatever it is that haunts me here in El Cajon, CA. I don't know what's haunting me. If I knew, I don't think it would haunt me anymore.

I'm a trusting person. Tell me your life story. It's true! Every word of it. I can tell from your eyebrows that you're telling the truth. You're telling the truth until you had been lying the whole time. But it's your life story. Maybe instead of lying to deceive me, the joke's on you, and now your life is different. What an interesting curse, for us to have to have lived up to what we say about ourselves.

I'm a little bit poor. I put together a collection of combs that I've saved, and I think about how it is that I take care of my hair in different ways on different days. I have more combs than I need, but I could probably only get \$1.62 for them if I sold them, so I might as well be wealthy.

There's a rat following me. I like him. I've de-

cided he's a him, but I haven't really looked closely, "he" could be a "her". Whatever. I can be friends with a rat without knowing its gender.

I like to type. I sometimes ask people if they have anything they want typed up, and I type it up for free. The flow, the activity, the percussion, these are what I live for. I don't care about money or time. I only care about pure existence.

You once came to my house and played with the furniture. You moved it around all day and all night. You were never pleased by the arrangement of things, although each arrangement got closer to something you believed in. You could feel the forward momentum, and each arrangement was a motion in a different direction, but each motion contributed to the overall momentum. At the end of time, all of the songs will come closer and closer to resolution, but never ever reach it.

Rats and dogs followed me to my wedding. I got married to a woman who was slightly taller than me. I know my own height — tall — and she was an inch taller than me, so that meant that she was a tall person, too. The rats scurried

around the room and made people uncomfortable, but I said “Let the dogs be with us, let the rats be with us as well.”

I’ve lived for 20 years in a yurt in the plains of Tibet, near Lhasa. I stay in the same place, my way of managing is to sell things to the nomads when they come through. I once entertained a tourist, showing her my collection of Tibetan toys. I meditate all day long, which enables me to not eat as much.

I’m proud of what I’ve achieved out here in Tibet. And I wonder what would happen if a terrible thunderstorm came, and flooded the whole high plain, and I died.

So when you came to me and were talking about all the ways in which you were smarter than me, I was all ears. I like hearing about people who are better than me. It makes me feel better about the world, like, the world must be a better place if people are even better than I would have guessed by thinking of myself.

I’m sure you’ll use your intelligence well — that’s the nature of intelligence, right?

Hothouse tomatoes are pretty good, I must say. It's worth it to have a hothouse tomato once in a while, in the dead of winter, in a cold country. It keeps your spirits up. I still don't know what I'm running from.

So every day I stop to smell the roses. There are specific roses which I smell. I know those roses. How, I can't say. I just know that when I smell other roses, they smell better. Like I've burned out on the roses I always smell. But I always take the time to smell them.

Everything is like something. You can be alone, but you can't be unlike. You can feel unlike, though. That's pretty harsh. Or pretty great. It depends on your personality.

My brother was telling me all about the last time he skied down the Grand Canyon. You can only ski down the Grand Canyon (which is located in northern Arizona), on certain days which can't be predicted, when great snowstorms come through and leave snow all the way down the side of the Grand Canyon. It requires the greatest skiing ability to slalom down the switchbacks to the bottom. He was telling me about the little boat that was at the bottom (the river

hadn't frozen), and how he whitewater rafted all the way down the Colorado River to that one artificial lake, where he encountered a 16 foot long lake shark, which scared him a lot, so he got out of the lake, and started to look for a place where he could get out of the (winter) sun, so he came into a small town in Arizona, where they had a small cafe which was of the kind which puts ketchup bottles on each of its tables, and while he was there, he met a young woman who talked to him about the sun, because his face was sunburned, and he told her all about Jennifer, and they exchanged numbers but he hasn't texted her, and probably never will.

A rat crawled into my house as I slept. I know because he (she?) chewed a hole in my cupboard, got in there, and chewed a hole in a flour sack, and ate some flour, and sneezed a little rat sneeze, and that's what woke me up because I'm a light sleeper, and I went in there and there was a little rat. And I was half-asleep, so I was just like "Whatever" and went back to bed. I hope that rat was grateful.

I stand on a branch of *Aufgenommen* (what does that mean? — the branch is so marked), which is itself a branching of the bigger branch, *Ucayali*, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree which has unimaginable roots.

—

So when I was a little kid, I used to like Christmas, because it was a day when I used to get a lot of presents. I lived for presents, in those days. Paying things out of my own hard work gave me no satisfaction. And so I'm glad that as an adult, every year I get to receive more and more of what I consume as a free gift.

—

Okay, so when I was telling you about all the times I got caught by the police before, I was totally lying. I've never been caught by the police before. They're never going to catch me. Is it because I never commit crimes? Or is it because they'll never catch me? It doesn't matter. I do what I do, and I'm the master.

—

Okay, when I was talking to you just a moment ago, was I telling you something that was boring you? You can tell me the truth. I won't get mad at you. Life is too short to get mad at people unless they really hurt you. I'm telling you this: I won't really get hurt by you if you tell me I'm boring you. I like it when I bore people.

—

I got a dog in the mail. I had to put her to-

gether. I'm not the best surgeon but I'm good with lightning and now I listen to her sweet barking all through the day and the night. I took her out to see the outside. I guess it was the first time she saw the outside. Or maybe not. I don't know where her brain had been before it got shipped to me. It doesn't really matter. She loved it out there. I showed her some good stuff, like a park where there are dogs. The other dogs didn't know she was part lightning, and they all just played, snapping and barking and running. It was pretty great. My dog and I then went down to the store where the people in the store gave her electric shocks, which she loved. (Batteries. Nine volt batteries.) Then she wanted to keep going and I was like "Schedule? Who needs that?" so then I went out to the hill where the sun was setting. I told her to sit and then I sat down next to her and we looked out at the sunset and at random things on the ground. It was probably the best day of my life, and I would even guess that it might have been the best day of her life. Unless every day is the best day of a dog's life, because it is the day that is theirs, and they don't have the days of the past competing with them. I don't really know what it's like to be a dog.

My brother wrote me a letter from prison. He was telling me to send him books. I was down, but I didn't have any that I had recently read, and he's already read all the old books I had.

So I went to the bookstore and looked through the dollar rack and I found a copy of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Hopefully I can find *The Two Towers* and *Return of the King* inside, though I may have to pay full, used, price.

Okay, well, when I'm a little bit taller, I'll go to bed. Right now I'm too short. But if I stay up a little bit and play guitar, then I think I'll be tall enough.

West of here is the Pacific Ocean. I'm standing here on the beach in Imperial Beach, CA, looking at the waves come in. I can see a ship out on the waves. That ship could take a person all the way to China (which is located on the east coast of the Eurasian continent, which consists of Europe, in the west, and Asia, on the east). But I won't be going on that ship. I'll be sleeping here on the beach.

I was in Nevada the other day, walking around the sagebrush, thinking about my life. Where can I go from here? I wonder. I can go up to Reno, I guess. Reno is a pretty good town. Or I could go to Vegas. I could probably catch a bus ride through the Mojave Desert (which is in between Las Vegas and Los Angeles) to Los Ange-

les. There, in Los Angeles, I could go to Venice Beach and walk up and down the beach, and then I could go to sleep on the beach at night.

If I put a good word in for you, would you do me the favor of also telling me something about myself I don't want to hear? I know it's weird. I want to hear what I don't want to hear. You can't just insult me with things that I don't care about. You have to tell me things that will make me lash back at you. That's what I really want. That's why I sought you out in the first place.

Okay, well, here's the thing. I've never been inside a movie theater with a dog before. I have to tell them that she's a service dog, and they'll know that I'm lying, but it's okay. As long as we go through the charade, they'll let me bring her in. She's a very well-behaved dog.

Okay, so one thing my dog isn't so good with is ducks. She wants to be friends with them, but they lead her inevitably close to the water, and when she touches it, her power goes out of her. This makes her yelp and whine and I have to go rescue her or else she can't move. I put a battery in her mouth and she comes alert again.

I look at a beautifully formed leaf at the northwest corner of the branch graffitied as Sokoban, which is a branching of the branch Ucayali, which connects with the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

I went to Rollercoaster Park one day by myself. You know, Rollercoaster Park up in Ventura County outside of Los Angeles. I bet you've been there and know how to get there.

I woke up that morning, in my hut on the beaches of Coronado, CA, and I thought I would go surfing, so I looked at each wave as it broke, trying to find the right one to follow, and I realized that the wave to surf was actually to drive to Rollercoaster Park in my old van, and there at Rollercoaster Park, something would be revealed to me. So I got in the car, the van, and drove up, it took me until 11 AM (I had woken up at 6AM and had eaten breakfast), and then when I was there I wondered how I would pay to get in. So I walked around the outside of Rollercoaster Park, wondering if what it was I was supposed to find there might come out through the slots in the fence, and I wouldn't have to go inside. I could hear the screams in the skin-death air, and if I closed my eyes I could imagine I was in hell, and I wondered "How can we all be

on this same planet at the same time? How is it that there are people on the other end of the world who don't know what life is like in southern California? How is it? How is it that there's a past and a future? Have I seen the one? And will I see the other? It's all an impossibility. This whole place is an impossibility, and there is very little that I know. Okay, well, I'll keep looking for quarters."

I walked around the place all afternoon, and I was getting tired. That's how I am these days, just a little more easily tired each day than the last. One of the trees was growing over the fence, so I sat down in the shade. A young woman came up to me and wondered why I was there. I told her, I'm looking for something and I don't know what. And she said, maybe you're looking for someone you know? And I said, no, because then I would know what I was looking for. I have no idea. And she said, huh, but then how can you find whatever it is you're looking for? Won't you have some idea of what you're looking for before you find what you're looking for?

No, I said, that's the thing, I'll just know. I'll know it suddenly and immediately and without precedent. And she said, Oh, like when people fall in love? And I said, Yeah, probably.

Maybe you want to fall in love? she offered. I said, Hm, no, now that's not what I want, because I thought of it. It could have been but

now it can't be. And she said, "Good, my name is Jacqueline, you can call me Jacky for short. I have cast my spell."

My brother was with me that one day when we were both at the Circle K over in National City, CA. That was the day when I got my first job. I was a waiter and I got cash tips. So I spent my first job-money (if not pay check) at the Circle K. I got some salted peanuts and beef jerky and a soda. It was a golden afternoon, the late afternoon of a summer 6PM in National City, CA, back when we were young.

I'm going to climb a tree some day. I'm not too old for that. I think if I just take my shoes off like when I was a kid, that should do the trick. I'm going to go against my natural inclination to just walk around and be an adult. We are coerced into being adults. So with discipline we must choose to be children. But it's not really discipline that that we're using. There's something like discipline that's not discipline, which we use to cut loose when we're the kind of people who don't cut loose anymore.

There's something important that I might be able to see if I climb this tree.

Okay, so what I want to do now is get your opinion. You are all gathered around at the bachelor party for my brother. We're all men here, we're all mature. What should we get my brother for his wedding? Remember that he's in prison, on an island in the Torres Strait (which is near Australia, which is a large landmass, yet, the smallest continent, in between the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean). Yes? Should we get him something civilized? Yes, it might be savage there in the Torres Strait. I've never been there. Maybe we could send him a necktie. Oh? You think maybe we should send him sunscreen, to help him in the tropical sunshine? His skin isn't suited for the tropics? Yes, that might be a good idea. But maybe we should send him some sense of freedom. How can we put freedom into a package?

I was at a restaurant that lasted all night, it was a marching restaurant, with harnesses held in front of people, containing pots of food and grids. It was a whirling exhilaration of discipline, the beating of time on the pots and the neighborhoods aroused, one neighborhood at a time, with the smell of persuasive food and the sound of the drumming. We went through Chula Vista, CA, and National City, CA, which is just north of Chula Vista, and then to Lemon Grove, CA and Spring Valley, which is an unincorporated community of San Diego County, CA. I

think some ghosts joined us to eat, I was pretty sure I'd seen them dead, shot dead in the neighborhoods. They wanted to know if we had figured out how to change human nature.

And so when I bought something from China, I thought it would make me happy, and I guess it kind of did.

I can see where the edge of the field is as I stand up on the branch inscribed Alforon, which connects to the larger branch Ucayali, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

The search for knowledge involves sniffing things... so it seems when I'm with my dog. She just knows where to sniff, she knows the meaning of smells, but I don't, even if I try to smell what she smells. I try my best, and I must say that smells are kind of cool. It's also interesting to kneel down next to my dog. I can smell that ozone smell from her electricity. Also, her unselfconscious breath. She's a good dog. And while I'm kneeling down, what I'm doing makes sense. I'm with my dog. If I were out for a walk by myself, that wouldn't make sense, but if I walk with her, it makes sense. I'm somebody

walking my dog. Anybody could do that, but nobody walks by themselves.

Smiling to myself, I remember when I was sixteen years old, just coming to understand what life was like in Denver, CO, which is called the Mile High City for good reason. I knew how to find things in Denver, CO, unlike in Aurora, CO, which was the suburb where I grew up. You know how when you cross a line, everything changes? It's like that with states, as well as with graduations.

I'm a pretty trustworthy person. I pay my taxes on time. Do you realize that? I've paid my taxes on time every single year I've been eligible. I'm in the taxpayer's hall of fame. Sometimes I pay voluntary taxes. I break little laws so that I get fined.

One time a witch cast me out using a spell. It was pretty intense but also funny because I came back in while she was recharging. She got all mad at me and said stuff which didn't hurt my feelings but just made her look like she was trying. But you know, whatever, the day before I tried to get rid of someone else and it didn't go well.

What do I think of witchcraft? I think there's too much craft to it. Too much I-It, not enough I-Thou.

Hunger afflicted me for about six years. It was weird, I never lost weight, but I was always hungry. I never gained weight, but I always ate. Maybe I was being hungry for another reality. I was putting food into the stomach of another reality? Somewhere there's this guy who doesn't understand why he's full all the time, and why he weighs so much without eating. *C'est la vie*, they say in France. *Quelque dans la mer*.

Casting lots, we came to understand how to divide and conquer the territories of our hearts. Our hearts were tremendous countries, easily as large as Ukraine, which is a western neighbor of Russia. We figured out how to subdivide ourselves by taking our fair cut of things, by pulling whichever straw we were going to pull. It was random and it was fair. That is how we divided and conquered our hearts, by dealing with straws, short and long. The straws had nothing to do with our hearts, but there they were, and we worked with them. And having subdivided our hearts, we were ready to build houses on them. And if we had houses, then people could move into them, perhaps people with children

and pet cats. And then having built our houses inside ourselves, we could become set in our ways, and pay taxes.

A rat scurried past me and I followed it. I wanted to see what a rat would do with a morning like this. Would he (or she) go to 7-Eleven? Nope, looks like no. How about Walgreen's? Nope, looks like no. This fellow citizen of National City, CA, walked quickly across the street and I followed her (or him), north-ish until we got to the Sweetwater River (which is a river in San Diego County). Then he (or she) got into some bushes that I wasn't prepared to go in, so I left her be.

I climbed up to the top of a crane. It was literally the scariest thing I ever did in my life. I had to do it. There are things you have to do, even if it doesn't make sense, and it's scary, and makes you hungrier.

I caught somebody rifling through my stuff but I was like "Let's see what he takes. My watch... uh huh... my credit card... okay, yeah... My cash... alright... my sandwich... Ooh... that's got some surprises in it. Don't know if that was such a good idea..."

He didn't see me and then a week later I saw him skulking around and I introduced myself to him. "Hello, I'm one of the luckiest people in the world." "Hey," he said, "That's cool. I'm pretty lucky myself." I looked in his eyes, and shook his hand.

I'm still being haunted, but the ghost (but it's not a ghost) is stretched out and sagging around my mind. I'm a little played out. I wonder if I will never find what I'm looking for? But surely it will surprise me at some point. I was in Vista, CA waiting for the Sprinter (a diesel-based locomotive which trafficks passengers between Oceanside, CA and Escondido, CA), when she called me on the phone. She was bored in Oxnard, CA, and wanted to know if I was bored in San Diego County. I said "Yes, I am bored. Maybe I'm about to find the thing which is haunting me."

It's time to climb down this branch, which is Agaetis Byrjun, down to climb down the branch Ucayali, to the nameless trunk from which will arise or has arisen another branch of the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

LITEVU

Okay, well, I guess everything is coming together pretty well. I've touched the sign at the end of the trail, which is one half of everything I have to do in my life. And the other half is just to jog back to my car, and get into it, and drive somewhere, I know not where.

"Deuces", I said, "I've got two twos, what do you have?"

"I've got a three of hearts and a four of diamonds", said Jackie, as we sat on the curb at Rollercoaster Park.

"So I guess it's my turn", I said, and I got up and went over by the gate, looking for someone with extra food as they walked out of Rollercoaster Park.

We were hungry and didn't have any food. Jackie was poor like me, she was from Los Angeles, CA, and had come to Rollercoaster Park not to go inside, but to sketch it from the outside. She had no money, just enough money to get there. She had discovered the secret to life, which is to find satisfaction in whatever you set your mind to. I did not understand this, and my eyes were blank and dull in the Southern Califor-

nia afternoon. The rollercoaster park was not satisfying me. I knew that if I could just get inside and get on one of the rides, it would shake me up. And that would in some sense be satisfying. But all I heard were the screams.

Jackie, on the other hand, absorbed what she looked at. It not only entered the appetite of her eyes, but also the appetite of... her heart? Her soul? There's some part of me that is awake when I see certain things, the things I'm genuinely interested in, and not when I'm looking at other things.

—

A baby was crying over at the end of the room where I was waiting to be summoned — for a plane, for a medical test, for jury service. The baby had not long ago been represented in our reality by a mass of stem cells which similarly did not know their future, but whose fate was determined by someone or something which really knew what was up.

—

I'm not much of a skier. (How do you even spell that word? "Ski-er?" "Skier"? Nothing sounds good to me.) But I was up at Big Bear, which I'm pretty sure is in Big Bear, CA or someplace like that, and I did some real good skiing, for a beginner, at least. I remember the clean, unfragrant air, the feel of cold, my lungs

hurting, my legs hurting, the adrenaline. I was going down about the steepest slopes I could handle — to protect the image we must share of me while I'm speaking to you, I won't say which ones. I had a good day skiing. When the sun got low in the sky I went back to the lodge and got there in time to watch the sundown — it was, if you'll permit the joke, "sky-ing". Skying is the incredibly exciting process of going down at exactly the speed you want to.

Grace spoke to me from across the room. She said, "Hello" and I said "You just walked in here" and she said, "You're okay". I had been adjusting my shirt in the living room that she shared with Jackie. Once Jackie and I scrounged up enough quarters to afford a ride out of there, I gave her a lift back to her apartment in Los Angeles, CA. She invited me in to chill out for a little bit.

She was in the bathroom, urgently, at the moment Grace came out of her bedroom and we first met. Grace said her name and I said mine. I offered the fact that I had given Jackie a ride back from Rollercoaster Park. Grace told me I was kind for having done that. She said that Jackie could be a boring person to hang out with. In my head I wanted to agree, but out loud I didn't say that, but Grace knew, when I said out loud "No, it was fun. We played cards for a long time". In my head I thought that

Jackie was someone who was in an uncanny valley: not so boring as to be cleanly to-be-put-in-the-background, but not so interesting as to catch my attention. I thought this was interesting and half-compelling. Out loud I said “So what do you do for a living?”

Grace said, “I’m a pharmacy assistant over in Inglewood, CA.” “Inglewood...” I said. “You’ve probably never been there”, she volunteered. In my head I thought “Have I ever been there? Yeah, maybe. That one time I was visiting Fred when he moved up to the Greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Area. I think it may well have been Inglewood he moved to.” But out loud I said, “No, I guess I haven’t. Do you like working there?” And she said, “No, not really. But I believe that work is about suffering. So actually I do like working there.” “Oh, I’m so sorry” I said out loud, while in my head there was a confused desolation. “What makes it so hard?” “The lines are long. People there really need to get what they need to get and they aren’t patient and considerate.” “Patient and considerate” I said, instinctually, “I like it when people treat me patiently and considerately.” “Yeah, me too. But it wears me down. Granted, the people there have much harder lives than I do.”

Just then, Jackie came in from the bathroom. “Oh hey Grace, I see you’ve met my new friend.” “Yeah,” she said, “So he’s your ride for the afternoon?”

“Hahaha” Jackie brittlely laughed, “It’s not like this is a pattern for me.” On the inside I knew it was a pattern, but on the outside I said, “No, it was fine, I had a good time”, an apparent, but not real, *non sequitur*.

We sat around talking for a little bit and then I had to go. The next day beckoned.

The light plays through the leaves of the branches above Jomfru, the one on which I stood, which leads down to the greater branch Litevu, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

Okay, well, so everything is coming together in my life. I’ve got a few different things coming together, like paycheck and bills, car and appointments, dates and good-times-had. I believe in a dualistic universe. I don’t believe in the simplicity of monism. No, everything comes in pairs. And so any given thing can be unfulfilled. Light needs darkness and darkness needs light. Light isn’t just another form of darkness, nor can darkness be reduced to light. I’m a dualist, a proud dualist, with a pride supplemented with humility.

I'm a painter by trade. I'm the first person to do what I do, which is whole-house mural painting. Every so often, in some neighborhoods, you see a mural on a house, but it's just on one wall, and it's only on the outside. I paint the entire exterior of a house, with some kind of meaningful scene. I work with the inhabitants to find how they want to represent themselves. People will spend \$500,000 for a house in a nice neighborhood, why not an additional \$20,000 for a real high class art work to adorn it? That's how I look at things.

Young people these days like to listen to their portable music players. All day long, wherever they go. I wonder sometimes what they're listening to, but then I tell myself I don't really want to know. Sometimes I mean that in the sense that I won't want to hear their music, which I guess is kind of sad, either that I'm so closed off or that they have such awful music. Other times when I say that I guess I mean that even if I liked their music, the well in me that would be filled by their music is full of rocks and already has whatever water it was going to have. So I don't ask them what they're listening to, and instead I just look away absently, at the things which paint themselves across my visual field.

Climbing the hill of death: what is there on the other side? I expected a garbage heap of bodies, but instead what I saw was just an ordinary neighborhood, which I guess makes sense, because after all, what kind of neighborhood did I walk out of to walk up the near slope of the hill of death?

I'm a little confused by what you're saying. Are you saying that I'm losing my hearing? I think my hearing is actually really good. I'm kind of offended that you would say my hearing isn't good. I mean, you can say whatever you want, but I'd rather not have to tell you what I think. I'd rather just pour everything into a gasoline can and take it down to my car, which ran out of gas on the side of H Street in Chula Vista, CA, and just drive away, wherever to, I don't know. Just to get away from you. Okay? My hearing is *not* bad.

Unkind people sometimes come in and out of my life. It's okay. I don't mind unkind people. They just remind me that I can do fine despite how people treat me. I guess if someone cut my arm, I'd bleed. That sounds unkind. But I think I'd survive. I don't think I'd die. And if, out of unkindness, they killed me, then I would keep living, because I'm going to live forever. I know that I'm going to live forever because no

matter what, I don't die, no matter how much I might want to. The primary feature of my life is that I must experience what I experience, and this iron rule defeats death.

Iron is something which I used to mine from the earth back when I was younger. I used to try to get the good stuff out of the Earth. Maybe people would laugh at me now. "Good job, looks like you've progressed to the Iron Age", they would joke. But if I got that kind of treatment, I would think "They made fun of people for being like animals, too, and who's laughing now? Animals are way better than people."

Discarding things feels really good. I feel like I'm taking care of things, cleaning things out. I can leave things behind, close old chapters, get on the road, drive to Las Vegas, NV, and gamble away my life savings.

I was a goalie when I was young, back when I played hockey. I would block the puck instinctually, moving out of the way by mistake when it was necessary for our team to lose.

One time when I was in Texas, a large United States state located more or less at the center of the United States, on the border with the United States' southern neighbor, Mexico, and I saw a grackle perched on a fence post by a mesquite tree. I took a picture and posted it online.

Roller coasters used to make me happy but now they just steal my soul. You know that feeling of soul-theft? I know you know what I'm talking about.

On my way back from the United States state of Kansas, where I attended the wedding of an old friend, we stopped in the southern part of the state of Colorado (which is one of the states of the United States of America). We stopped at the Movie Manor, which is a motel where you can watch movies from your room. It's like a drive-in movie theater — in fact, it is a drive-in movie theater — but it is possible to see the giant outdoor screens from many of the rooms. I lay on the bed, letting the stress of the day's travel wash off of me, while enjoying American audiovisual culture. I was fulfilled.

Holly and Fred used to be really good friends, even lovers at times. They talked about getting

married, but then things took too long, and Fred had to move to the Greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Statistic Area, north of us, in order to pursue work. So I was left with Holly, I was the third wheel before, and I became her boyfriend. I remember we spent a lot of time together during that summer after she broke up with Fred over her cell phone, she and I walking up and down the beach of Encinitas, CA, the waves crashing, us talking about life, that cosmic and indescribable thing.

The air is heavy with pollen on the spring branch, which projects over every other spring branch and is even near a late-hearted winter branch, and this spring branch is Elvira, and this branch connects to the larger branch Litevu, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with indescribable roots.

Holly had a brother named Hollis. I didn't understand what her parents were thinking, and neither did they. Their parents had died by this point, and could not be asked, and in the Hollis/Holly house, no one really cared about names. No one said anything in that house, there were things they said, but there was a layer at which they did not say anything. And so in any case, Hollis was a real pain. Hollis was a stickler for rules, and Holly and I made fun of

him behind his back. Hollis was a real individual, though. He was a skateboarder. He only skated at skate parks, spaces which were specifically designated for skating. And he did not go to the illegal, *ad hoc* skate parks, those blocks and ramps constructed under bridges and wherever they could be hid. No, he went to the skate parks the city established, and he enjoyed himself.

Great grandparents are the kind who pass on to their grandchildren some kind of essence of who they are. My greatest grandparent was my paternal grandmother, who taught me how to write. At the time, she simply taught me my ABCs (and other similar letters), but I think this is half the battle. The other half is simply having something to say.

One time Holly and I went to the rodeo out in Lakeside, CA. I am unsure if Lakeside is officially a city or not: I'm not sure it deserves the full honor of an incorporated city. But it has a lake, and not every collection of houses and businesses has a lake at its heart. I wish I had a lake in my heart, in the midst of my houses and businesses.

I went to the rodeo with Holly one time and we watched the bulls and horses make their moves. The energy of those large quadrupeds was powerful, irreplaceable by nature documentaries, even of elephants. Holly took my hand at one point, and I understood why, because I myself felt the horror and wonder of what we were doing, juxtaposing order and fences with unspeakable life.

“Ghosts sometimes visit me late at night. I’m always freaked out when I first intimate to myself their presence, but then I get over it. ‘Oh, okay, ghosts again.’ There’s one ghost named Pauline, who used to live in Holly’s house when she was a girl. Holly stopped believing in ghosts, which personally insulted Pauline, who had totally appeared to her. They had had heart-to-heart talks when Pauline was in middle school, that time of life when people say ‘Bloody Mary’ ten times to the mirror of a darkened midnight bathroom. So now I know all these dark secrets about Holly, that young woman who seems to lack the faintest trace of darkness, (don’t worry, these are funny adolescent dark things not scary ones) and then I just tease her about these things and she is beginning to wonder if I’m psychic. Serves her right for not believing in ghosts.”

The preceding was written back when I was dating Holly.

One thing I used to do in the afternoons in Escondido, CA (located just 35 minutes away from the Riverside County line, thus placing it in the northern part (so-called “North County”) of San Diego County, CA), was to ride my scooter around the houses in the neighborhood, on the sidewalk. It could get pretty hot in the afternoons, and a lot of times when I was doing this, it was right after school, or at least after I had had a snack, which didn’t take too long so it was pretty much right after school, when a lot of other people were busy with whatever else, and so the streets were pretty empty and hot, which is kind of like a desert. They say Southern California was a settlement in a desert, and I believe them, whoever they are, people I’ve heard say that.

Riding my scooter around, I would never wonder what was going on inside the houses, they were black boxes unless I had to know what was going on inside of them, like someone left the door open and I could see their TV on or something, or when people yelled at each other and if these had been the days of cell phones I would have called the cops who wouldn’t have come.

Trust is something that comes and goes. Sometimes I’m just as trustworthy as I’ve ever been,

but people I know trust me more, or less. They tell me more, or less, of their secrets, and let me do more, or less, risky things with the things they own. I don't understand this, and I'm not sure that I can. Trust just is what it is, it can't even be commanded by trustworthiness.

I'm usually not a monkey, but one time when I was a monkey, hanging from a tree in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is a nation in just about the center of the continent of Africa, which is located south of Europe and I guess I'd say southwest of Asia, um, I was a monkey hanging in a tree, just kind of spacing out, taking a break from being a monkey, thinking about philosophy, which is not the kind of weird depressing stuff that people think about, but, you know, monkey philosophy, which like human philosophy rides the edge between comprehensibility and incomprehensibility... where am I going with this story anyway? The point is, I've been a monkey.

Werewolves are howling at the moon, which shines through the leaves of the branches above me, as I sit with my legs swinging back and forth on the branch named Uriyah, which simply and modestly connects to Litevu, which is a bigger branch connecting to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

I was a secretary back when I lived in Vista, CA. Yes, I was a man back then. I worked in a small office of an important Vista lawyer, a man who dealt with accidents and other similar distresses leading to dealings with hospitals and courts. This man I worked for believed in being in the community, and worked so hard he barely had time to go home and come back. He took a lot of *pro bono* cases. He believed that everyone deserved vigorous representation. As far as I could tell, and I think I might have known enough, he only took a case if it had merit. He was a good lawyer, a credit to the California Bar.

I'm not sure how the time passed so quickly. Was it that we were saying such good things to each other, or was it that I was sitting at the bus stop, waiting for the bus to take me from the Granite Hills neighborhood of El Cajon, CA (over on the east end of El Cajon) back to the El Cajon Transit Center over on the west end, where I could catch the Trolley to La Mesa, CA? I can never be sure these days, whether the rapid, runny passage of time comes because I have learned how to appreciate the smooth, refreshing taste of all reality, or because I'm waiting around for whatever it is that really happens.

You know who I ran into the other day? Jackie. “What are you doing in Imperial Beach, CA?” I asked. She said that she was done with the Greater Los Angeles, CA area, and she was living down in Chula Vista, CA now. She liked going down to the border, but she hadn’t crossed yet. “No habla español muy bueno” she said convincingly. She wanted to know what I was doing in Imperial Beach, CA. “Oh, I was just grabbing a bite and watching the waves a little bit.”

“Do you ever go in?”

“What?”

“The waves.”

“Yes, sometimes I do.”

“That’s good. Some people never go in the ocean. I think those people don’t understand what’s good in life.”

“I disagree. I don’t think the ocean is that good.”

“But you go into it?”

“Yeah, but that’s because it’s there.”

“Okay, I understand. It’s like Rollercoaster Park.”

“Okay, yeah, I can see that. I guess the ocean is like Rollercoaster Park.”

“But the ocean is better than Rollercoaster Park.”

“Yeah, I guess that makes sense.”

“I like going in the ocean.”

“Careful with this beach, sometimes the water from the Tijuana River (which drains parts of Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico) contains sewage which makes the beach unsafe. You should definitely heed any applicable warnings.”

“I will. I’m a warning-heeder.”

“I think this conversation is like Rollercoaster Park.”

“I think it’s like the ocean.”

“Okay, I agree with you.”

—

Pauline hasn’t come around as often, but as she has in the past, she slipped into my bedroom when I was trying to sleep and as often, caused in me that feeling of creeping unspeakability which I know well but for necessary reasons never get used to.

She seemed strangely at peace. I wanted to know if she was going to go back down to Sheol and rest with the other shades.

“No,” she said, “I’m not ready for that yet. I’m only 111 years old.”

I felt honored, to finally know her age. “You’re 111? Wow, so is that from when you died, or when you were born?”

“From when I was born. The experiences of a living person inform who they are as a ghost.”

“Why are you so at peace? Is everything OK?”

“It seems like it is.” she said gravely.

“Oh, I’m so sorry to hear it”, I said. “I know how much you need to pronounce woe and feel the disconnection of the two halves of your heart.”

“Peace is part of being a ghost”, she said. “We understand that dissonance is harmony, and that harmony is its own dissonance.”

“That’s a really peaceful thing to say.”

“I know,” she said, and though her face was a mask of peace-or-pain, I could see humor and sorrow in her eyes — then I looked again and could not see them.

Vicodin used to be a friend of mine, one of those friends who steals your stuff and leaves you dealing with issues for years after you get free of him. Vicodin is why I was living in a van in Coronado, Imperial Beach and pretty much any parking lot that would have me. Vicodin was a product prescribed to treat my back pain, and it worked. Vicodin and I bonded, and Vicodin was always already on the way, and I never had Vicodin. I will always long for Vicodin, and I will never have Vicodin again. If I get hurt again, there will have to be some other way to deal with my pain.

I took a vacation to the East Coast of the United States of America. I drove a rental car on Interstate 15 until it reached Interstate 40 somewhere not too far from the Nevada border. And then I took the 40 east through northern Arizona (one of the Southwestern states of the United States). And eventually I made it to the shore and had clams.

The sleepy moonlight oozes through the bower of leaves. It drips onto my shoes and I think to myself "how is it I'm keeping my balance so well on this branch called Prstina, which connects to the branch Litevu, which connects to the name-

less trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.”

—

Corsica is an island in the Mediterranean Sea (which is actually an extension of the Atlantic Ocean), and it is there that the famous world figure Napoleon Bonaparte was born. Have you ever heard of the Napoleonic Code? That comes from him. It’s interesting: of course the conqueror gets to set the laws, but I guess this means that the conqueror might be someone who loves order, or justice. If I loved justice enough, could I conquer large portions of the globe, leaving behind my law code? No, that’s not the kind of person I am.

—

Core motivations are key. Without core motivations, I would be at the mercy of everyone else’s motivations. Where do motivations come from? They just are. No, that isn’t true. They come from God. At first they come from whatever, but the ones that remain, over time, come from God. God is persistent. He isn’t that strong, but he never dies. People who never die eventually win.

Are God’s provided motivations good? Well, who knows? Motivations just are. Good and bad just is. No, that’s not true. God’s motivations are good. How wonderful they are.

I'm running a hot engine in my car. My car overheats when I drive up long grades. I live in the part of California that's not far from Death Valley, which is the lowest place in North America, and the hottest place in the world. My car overheats when I drive to and from the grocery store, it doesn't need a grade, or the heat itself is like a grade. It doesn't even need the heat. When I'm driving around San Diego County, CA, to meet up with friends, it overheats. It's just not that good of a car.

Ham and eggs... what a strange breakfast. It's the first time I had meat in years. Why ham? Because I was visiting someone and that's what they had. I couldn't turn down their hospitality, so I didn't. I thought of the unreality of the ham rather than the reality of the pig.

Indelible marks have never been left on my body. Okay, that works for me, I've never loved an image enough to want it tattooed to me. I think tattoo parlors are fine establishments, employing artists. But I myself will never enter one, never to support an artist. I'm allowed three "never"s in my boundaryless life and I used one of them just now on getting a tattoo.

I wonder what the carrot would think, the sentient carrot, the carrot made out of the same substance as me (but with more of the inner element that is expressed as “beta carotene” in my phenomenal reality) as it gets pushed through the food processor. Sometimes we get narrowed in to what we get narrowed into, and we contact that which has no relation to our life so far, no relation to the first honesty of the seed sprouting in the field, and the tenderness of the sprayed water, and the glory of the sun and the pleasure of photosynthesis, the growing and even the picking and washing and sorting and loading and driving and displaying and buying — all of that leads up to something, and //

Griselda was a young woman I met at a cafe in Chula Vista, CA. We got to talking about various things, about the book I had been reading and whatever it was she was into (I wish I could remember better). Anyway, I tell you this story to mention that she happens to know my brother. I asked her where she knew him from and she said, “I met him waiting for jury duty. We went out a few times after that, but then I met my boyfriend, Carlos.” And just like that, Carlos appeared, and Griselda went with him to their own table.

Young people come in and out of my life. It seems like my friends never age, but I do. That's okay with me. I have one foot in the grave (Pauline wants me to join her), so I have to keep the other foot planted in the flower of life. I need to live until I'm old, that's the deal I made with life. I'm sorry Pauline, if you chance across this. It's how things are. But I guess you might be used, by now, to dealing with the living.

I like toast. Toast is a cheap way to make bread better. I put some butter on it, and that's cool, but there are other options too. I'll starve to death if my food isn't interesting enough.

Grass tastes pretty good to a cow, I think. I don't know, I've never been a cow. Maybe for a cow, grass is like Rollercoaster Park is for me and Jackie, or even how the ocean is for me. You can look at it, taste it, eat it, swallow it, get life out of it, move on, whatever.

Why are there army men in this town? There's Camp Pendleton for the Marines, up in the northernmost part of the coast of San Diego County, extending inland, and there are various

Navy things here and there and everywhere, but why would there be army men, trooping through town? Are we being invaded? Are we the invasion?

The army doesn't mean us any harm, so it appears. That's good, because I wouldn't want to be harmed.

Am I dreaming? I've been dreaming recently. No, I think I'm awake, because there's nothing that's all that great in my life. I jumped up in the air and floated once — a great soldier skill. But I was dreaming. No army for me. Just as well, I lack the appetite to kill. I'd forget where I put my gun, and then I'd get chewed out by my superior, but it wouldn't hurt my feelings, and I'd stop moving and get disciplined and stop eating and maybe get discharged due to (perceived) mental illness problems, or maybe die out in the field. But I wouldn't stay dead, I'd become a ghost and join Pauline, or maybe that would be the thing which would enable her to get over herself and move on, and go to rest in the grave.

—

I have seen the abyss, and I cannot unsee the abyss. The abyss is always with me. I'm okay with the abyss, but it disables me in some ways.

—

All the people with whom I associate are like me, so it would be an insult to assume that any one of them would fail to do the things which all people must do, all the polite things, like washing their hands. People I don't associate with could do anything, but they are not the ones I talk to or concern myself with. I have to maintain a positive, non-suspicious view of the social reality that is most relevant.

The moon has entirely dribbled on the leaves below this tree, having leached leaves out of the branches, sending them back to winter. How strange what happens late at night, here as I lie down on the hard branch called Orestes, which connects to the branch Litevu, its connection to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

PERESTROIKA

If I were to tell you all of the things that mattered most to me, I would say three things, not to tell you the whole truth, but just because, given that we're not the closest friends, but we are friends, I would tell you a few things that you would be able to take into yourself and add to your concept of who I am. One of them would be light. I need light like some people need water. I need water too, just as any human being would. But some people live in caves, deep beneath the earth, and drink from the waters that flow underneath, but never seem to need the sun.

Cloves and garlic can make a meal taste good. They taste pretty strong, but that's okay. When I eat a meal, I want to know I've eaten it.

Righteous people often have a sense of settled confidence about them. Does this mean that settled confidence is a good indicator of righteousness? I'm not so sure about that.

Giving my okay for a project is something I do

from time to time. I'm a CEO of a major company which I run out of my van in a beach parking lot somewhere in San Diego County, CA, which is located in the southwest corner of the continental United States.

People don't really know me. They think I'm all one thing or another. They associate all kinds of properties with their thought of me. I understand. I'm kind of the same way. If I knew that you were a CEO of a major company, I would think you were like my brother, who is a CEO of a major company. And anything you did, I would think was something he did. I know, it's weird. But it goes along with being able to extend my thinking forward, and outward.

Holly was a CEO of a major corporation as well. Her company manufactured large engines for medium-sized boats. Unfortunately, her company was losing money. We tried some infusions of cash, but it looked like it was going down anyway. My brother wasn't going to invest, and maybe he made the right decision. I don't know. Sometimes you just have to invest in your girlfriend-at-the-time's company.

Trust is something that I've usually just given

without thinking. I mean, isn't that the point? I can imagine myself in a presidential debate. (This is like things that United States presidents have said, but about drugs.) "Senator, have you ever trusted?" (The senator is a different candidate.) "Yes, but I did with utmost care and thoughtfully." Then the moderator turns to me and says, "Supervisor of San Diego County..." and I say "Yees?" "Have you ever trusted?" and I'd say "Yes."

"Have you ever trusted thoughtlessly?"

and I'd say "I thought that was the point."

Grab me a coffee, I said. I LOVE coffee. Coffee gets me through many a board meeting. I HATE board meetings. I hate all kinds of meetings. People should just know the answers without talking to each other. Okay, I know that's impossible sometimes. But there still should be a substitute for meetings.

When the water of the Pacific Ocean kisses the sand of the seaward beach of Coronado, CA, "that's *amore*". When someone in Del Mar looks west at the setting sun over the waves, "that's *amore*". But when the moon looks down on Santee Lakes (located in Santee, CA), and little fish

leap up in the moonlight, that doesn't count because it's not the Pacific Ocean.

Tryptophan is my favorite amino acid. The only other ones I can rattle off are arginine, alanine, and strychnine. Strychnine is a poison, so it's pretty crazy that it's part of the human body. Crazy how things that aren't good can be part of things that are good.

I'm casting about for a reason to live. I'm a really logical person ... why not an "emotion to live"? Wait, are you then saying that an emotion is a reason? That makes sense. No? You're saying I could just have an emotion to live that's *not* a reason. I don't understand. I am ruled by logic, and exclude your reality.

I ate a doughnut once that reminded me of France. I've never been to France. So why did this doughnut remind me of France? I don't know, but it did. That's how life is, we do things that we can't explain, eating doughnuts that remind us of France.

When you wish upon a star, if the star realizes

it, it's like it got tugged on the sleeve by its starchild. That's how you know you're a starchild, it's when you wish upon a star and the star realizes it and tells you "Hold on, I'm busy."

Tracking things that go through the mail is kind of hard. What if they don't pay attention and make a mistake? Then I might not ever find out that my package was on the way, though it might have long ago arrived.

So back to the topic of coffee. I need to have a mixture of Arabian and Ethiopian blends. It's really important. I'm totally immune to caffeine by now, so what wakes me up about coffee is the specific flavors, which remind me of when I stayed up all night laughing and discussing politics in Somalia (a country located on the east coast of Africa).

The last of the bats who live in the upper branches of this tree (which I shall discuss in a second) flutter past eating the insects of the night, which will soon run backwards toward the western sunrise, which is not where the sun is supposed to rise, even in the Southern Hemisphere, which will then illuminate the branch I stand on, Biarritz, which itself connects to Pere-

stroika, which is the greater branch, connecting to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

I caught a fish the other day. I caught the little guy eating off the bottom of the pond. I've been trying to teach him not to do that. But you can't shame a fish, you have to figure out a different way to go.

I got on a merry-go-round, trying to find God. I guess I thought if I got a view of the whole world, if that could be integrated into one experience, one continuous whirl, I would be about to see beyond all experience, and see God through everything. It must be hard being the invisible God, convincing people you exist. It's like, if some guy said he was saying the words of God, no one would believe him. So God has to speak through everything, but everything has to be the way it is. Everything has to be itself, too. So God doesn't get a lot of chances to speak through the world.

I felt like I saw God, on the merry-go-round, but after I got off, I was dizzy and I thought "maybe I was dizzy". It was a thought that was ready at hand. So now I'm not so sure. I think there might be some difference between being dizzy and seeing God, but there's a certain kind of re-

semblance, I would think. So I can't really be sure.

See how hard it is to be God? You thought it was easy, but actually it's the hardest job in the world.

—

Racing is something I like doing. It doesn't matter what I'm doing, I like to race. Racing is a good metaphor for me. It's like getting flushed down a toilet.

—

Jackie found me by the beach, on the bayside of Coronado, CA (there's a bridge that connects Coronado, CA with the mainland. It used to be a toll bridge, but not anymore.)

She said, "Hey, Joe... Is that your name?"

"No," I said, "but that doesn't matter."

"Joe, I want to ask you a question."

"Shoot."

"Bang!" She shot me through the heart with her air gun (you know, like an "air guitar").

"Okay, so do you think it's a bad thing that there aren't a lot of famous newspaper comic

strip cartoonists who are women? Like there are a few, but it's mostly a male field. Do you ever worry that we're missing out on female voices there?"

I said "I do. I worry a lot about that. I read the comic page every single day, and it's full of machismo, like this super-subtle form. Do you think it's your calling in life to make comic strips for the newspaper?"

"I think it is."

We realized that history had just been made, not realizing at the time that the more significant history was between us, much more so than in the eyes of the world.

—

Sitting in the back of my van, with the shell open, I play my fiddle and sometimes surfers will come by and request something. "Can you do 'Louie, Louie'?" Another guy wants "Swami's Jig", which I make up, mixing Indian and Irish, then realizing what Swami's really is, but forging ahead. The world needs more Indian-Irish fusion music, right?

You see, I'm actually a musician. Every time I scrape my bow across the strings, in some other universe a passionate dedicated me stands on a mysterious stage with screaming, leaping people being filled and put in tune with each other,

thinking they're communing with me, but they're really communing with each other.

Trap me if I've told this story, put out your snare and let me get caught in it, let me walk into your joke and laugh at me. One time, I was at Rollercoaster Park and I ran into this random young woman named Jackie, and we walked around Rollercoaster Park and bummed quarters off the pavement, but mostly other people, and then I never saw her again.

I laughed on the branch called Selkie, which cried me down to Perestroika, which connects me to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

I got the news the other day that Jackie died. "What?" I said "I don't believe it."

"Oh, she's definitely dead."

"What happened?"

"Who knows. We found a dead body though."

"Are you sure the body is dead?"

“Yes.”

“Okay. So this isn’t a joke?”

“No. She’s dead.”

“Why did you call me? I don’t know her that well.”

“We’re calling everyone in her phone.”

“Who are you guys?”

“Let’s just say that we’re everybody’s friend in a time of need.”

“Okay, so is there going to be a funeral?”

“We don’t know yet. She didn’t have a lot of friends.”

“Okay. Well, let me know. You have my number.”

“Yes, ‘Joe’, we will.”

“‘Joe’?”

“That’s the name she put in her phone, in quotation marks.”

“Wow, thanks guys.”

“We’ll be in touch, bye.”

A lot of thoughts ran through my head. I wondered if her death had anything to do with the fact that she had just found her life's mission. Maybe her life's mission was just to find her life's mission. I also wondered if the contrary were the case, if her death had nothing at all to do with her life's mission.

I thought of changing my name to "Joe" (with quotation marks) in her honor, but decided against it. It was just a misperception, after all.

I lay down in the back of my van, parked in a neglected corner of Escondido, CA, thinking about how short life is, and wondering about if people ever come back from "the Other Side". I know, Pauline would seem to be evidence that they do, but maybe I was just hallucinating her. What's more likely, that I was hallucinating a ghost, or that ghosts really exist?

I decided to go trespassing. I was feeling down in the dumps about Jackie, and there's nothing like risking life and limb to jolt me out of my doldrums. You'll remember that I am completely immune to caffeine.

So I was trying to find a place to trespass, and you know, normally it's as easy as pie, but I was

having a hard time when the urge struck. I was walking through downtown Chula Vista, CA, my van parked somewhere a little inconvenient to get to, and somehow, all I was seeing were open businesses, and like, places where maybe technically I could loiter, but they wouldn't even enforce that. Of all the moments to not be way out on the edge of town, I thought.

I had a doughnut that definitely had cardamom in it. Sometimes these little Chula Vista, CA, doughnut shops surprise me. You think all you're going to get is nutmeg, but then they go and put in cardamom.

I went hang-gliding over at Torrey Pines. I went by myself. This is something I used to do with Holly. She was a real risk-taker. It's a good trait in a CEO. It wasn't the same without her.

I miss her, from time to time. And then I think about how time is moving on, and I realize that all of life is like being flushed down the toilet: irresistible.

I bought a necklace of pearls for Holly once. She liked it. I think it looked good on a flight attendant (that was back when she was a flight atten-

dant, the first month that we were going out, not long after that other guy “vacated the scene”, making way for me to drift into her confidences.)

She looked really nice in pearls, it really was a good look for her. The good thing about an era in which people are generally more indifferent about dress is that then it allows classy accessories to really stand out, to be twice as beautiful, as it were. And the people who don’t care, can go on not caring, just as much. A win-win for everyone.

Sitting in my mansion, looking out over the ocean, wondering whether I chose to live here in Del Mar, CA, or if Del Mar, CA chose me to live here, I thought, “Why am I alive? I don’t know. If I knew why I was alive, would I realize that everyone else needs to be alive? Yes, I think I would. If I could just find the meaning of life, then I would sell everything I have, and give it to the poor, so that they could live.”

There’s a coaster on my living room coffee table. The coaster has a picture of a train on it. I put my mug of coffee down on the coaster and pick up the paper. I look in the comic section, and it strikes me: “Jackie will never get the chance to compete with these guys, and give support to

the few women I do see here.” Life goes away just like that. Maybe Jackie’s death reminds me of the meaning of life. Maybe life means something if it bums me out when she dies. It’s like, if you take something away from someone, they realize how valuable it was to them. It’s not like Jackie’s even the biggest deal to me. But I still feel a lump in my throat when I think about her cut-short possibilities. I look at the page, and none of the comics are even funny today. Not one. And almost all of them have that subtle machismo to them, that micro-aggressive patriarchy.

Life is so frustrating. The waves crash on the bluff down below my mansion, and I can hear them through the open window. The golden afternoon comes in on my millionaire bathrobe. I can identify what’s going in me: my emotion is just a show my body puts on, but I am really at peace about Jackie’s death, and about the deaths of millions of people I’ve never known. I don’t believe in my mansion, but I don’t believe in leaving.

I am so empty inside, so terribly empty. It’s terrible that I can’t feel the terribleness of it.

At this moment, Pauline appears.

—

I stand on the branch called Trieste, which serves as a diving board which I will not use,

into the chlorinated pool which grows in the shade of the branch Perestroika and some of the other branches that connect with the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

I'm thinking about where to go for vacation. My van recently came back from the mechanics. I was thinking of doing things like old times, just me and the van and however much gas it takes. I'm thinking of driving up the coast to Oregon, which is a United States state located just north of California. I think that way I can go to San Francisco, CA and drive across the Golden Gate Bridge, which is something rich people should do. Then when I get up into Marin County I can decide on the spur of the moment to drive to Napa Valley. This is something I can do in my van, which I would not be able to do if I took the train, and probably wouldn't even think of if I was walking.

I hear the weather in coastal Oregon can be overcast. Seeing as to how I've never left California, I don't know if I can really assume that that's the case. I tend to only believe what I experience myself. But I do know from times I've visited Humboldt County, CA, which is in the northern part of the state of California, that that region can often be overcast, so I think "Why not? The part of California that's geographically closest to Oregon tends to have that kind of weather. Maybe there's a connection."

I'm getting a little sleepy, which is good. It's a long night ahead of me, since my van has been stolen, and I lie here on the beach in Imperial Beach, CA. I don't really wish that I had more money and a settled home. I just hope that sleep comes to me soon, and nobody disturbs me. But that's okay. It's not like there's a point to life.

I think maybe I've arrived. Arriving wasn't getting mentioned in a "Weird" Al Yankovic song, nor was it being feted at Lincoln Center. Arriving was getting to the point where rich or poor, me or anybody else, was fine.

But what do I do after I've arrived? Kurt Cobain didn't live too much longer (that native of Washington state, the United States state that is even farther north, it is said, than Oregon). But there are some who have many years of smooth, gliding flow left, whose accolades, accomplishments and limp late-career albums and later-career triumphs all come to them on the sideboard, and the main course is just a big plate of Being.

Some would consider me the luckiest man in the world, as I lie wealthy in the sand, but I wish I could think differently... but if you're wealthy,

there are simply some thoughts you are incapable of thinking.

As I lie in the sand, Pauline meets me for the first time in a long time, and I say to her:

“Whoa! You startled me.”

“Sorry,” she said, her voice clear but transparent to the waves. “I know it’s been a long time, my friend. I’ve been working on my own issues.”

“Don’t worry about it. Here you are. *Carpe noctem.*”

“Life is short. YOLO”, she impenetrably replied. “Yes, I want to know what’s going on in your life.”

“Well, I’ve just been realizing that I’ve arrived as a person. Like I could die and be a ghost but I’d still just be existing the same as before. Nothing can touch me.”

“It sounds like you might be suffering from eternal life. We ghosts have a similar term for that: *acedia.*”

“What can I do about it?”

“I’m not sure what works for living persons. We ghosts are always able to just dial into something to bear witness to, some horror or other,

and that keeps us grounded in our ghost-ungrounding.”

“Ghost-ungrounding?”

“It’s a translation of a German word, which means the ungroundedness that it is necessary for a ghost to be grounded in in order to be a ghost. The essence of being a ghost is an instability. That’s part of why I haven’t been able to visit you. I don’t have control of the path that my unlife takes.”

“Wow. Say, someone I know died recently. Her name was Jackie. Do you know anything about her?”

“No, but I can sense that your spirit was in tune with hers in some ways. I don’t know if you loved her, but you were in tune.”

“Yeah, I think I know what you mean. I don’t know if I loved her, but I was in tune, a little.”

“More than you realize, I think. Yes, because she matters to you, I can bias my drifting in your direction, if I have news of her.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it.”

“The emptiness is mine.”

“Is there anything I can do for you in return?”

“Well, you have a lot of life in you. Maybe you can make a name for yourself, find a horror, and get rid of it. There are some of us ghosts who need a rest from our horrors, who could use a rest in the grave. Think about it. I don’t know if you will, but I’ve suggested that you think about it. Maybe you will.”

“Wow. Here I am, lying on the beach, not caring about anything, and you give me a task...”

“No, it’s not really a task, it’s just the invitation to find a task.”

“Yes, this will be hard. I don’t know how I’ll do it.”

“It may be impossible.”

“Yeah. I’m not feeling the rebelliousness in me that I would hope from you saying that. All I feel is acceptance of the impossibility of it.”

“You aren’t so young anymore.”

“I know. I wish I had a calling like Jackie’s.”

“What was hers?”

“Very soon before she died, she realized that her purpose was to draw a newspaper comic strip from the perspective of a woman.”

“Yes. That is a calling. Better if she had known

the names of the characters and how their faces looked, but good enough. You still need a calling. Or you need to find a way to do what you need to do without a calling. Either way.”

“For a dry, dead, disembodied spirit, you care a lot.”

“It’s only because I’m a troubled soul. Someday I will be as you are.”

—

So I looked up at the eucalyptus tree in Balboa Park and marveled at how tall it was. These trees must be some of the oldest in San Diego County, CA. Certainly the oldest of this type, I would think from how tall they are. I walked around Balboa Park, looking at the touristy young people and the young touristy people and the young people and middle-aged people on dates and there was a crowd around a magician and everyone was walking past the musicians. It was a glorious bright not-yet-golden afternoon, and I walked into the Museum of Man, to try to understand the history of mankind and the way I was feeling, which knew what it needed to feel.

—

Left-handed people hand me handkerchiefs on this branch called Wroclaw, high above the forest floor, a branch which connects to the great branch Perestroika, which itself connects to the

nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

XIANJIANG

Sitting on a log, I could feel the log rolling underneath me and I adjusted my weight, using my abdominal muscles and my arms to balance. I could see fish swimming around underwater, but I was highly preoccupied by keeping myself above water. There was a cluster of grapes on the other end of the log, which had recently been a human being. How strange it is how things change, one thing into another.

I downloaded a new app for my smartphone. It was an encyclopedia app, to teach my smartphone everything there is to know about the world. I'm proud of my smartphone. Actually, my smartphone is what I call my son. I'm teaching my son in the 1980s which involves encyclopedias. I call him my smart phone because through him I communicate with the outside world. I'm bound to my bed. I call the encyclopedia an app because it's like an apple: of Eve or Eris. I know what I'm doing to my smartphone, making him ready for his adulthood in the 21st century. I'm making him as cracked and worn as the top of a glass table that's been scratched and dropped but which hasn't broken. My smart phone is with me when I most need him. When he gets lonely, I tell him to go out and play.

Time has certainly passed. Maybe you don't recognize me. As I walked the streets, I saw three people whom I once knew, who did not recognize me, and when I came to my home, there was my wife, and she did not look up to greet me.

A cursory look around the apartment shows how I've been living: my shrine to Jackie, my computer, my pile of books, the unvacuumed carpet, the dish that had food on it, but which now has crumbs, which, as I'm noticing it and talking about it, I'm putting in the little kitcheny part of my apartment, for future further processing.

Sit down on the padded folding chairs which are what I sit on when I'm not sitting on the floor.

Let me tell you my story.

Radical changes happen in my life from time to time. Maybe one day I'll join the army. That would be a radical change. I see every carpet and there is no floor underneath. There is no army behind the army, it is a facade. It appears to have depth, but it's just the part of the simulation that's there to tell a story of depth, and in reality nothing exists except that which I ex-

plore.

Oh, I am weary of all of this... will someone show me depth? But the kind of person who would show me depth is the kind of person I would not believe had shown me depth. Sometimes we get stuck in positions that can only be broken out of by discontinuity..

A millipede walked across my path as I walked home late at night. I stopped to look at it. It was really there.

I'm the proud owner of a new artificially-manufactured diamond. It's very small and it's part of a grinding device. I'm never getting married.

Holly called me the other day. I was a little bit surprised. It's been a while. She wanted to meet up sometime. She said she had been really busy with work, but that she wanted to just catch up and stuff. I said, "Yes, let's meet up somewhere." So we met up somewhere, and talked, and caught up.

Holly has been working in an office as a manager. She recently fired some people, and then hired other people. I talked about my van.

We both wanted to know if the old days could come back, the days we hang-glided over Torrey Pines, the nights we would go out to nice, quiet bars and get a little drunk. Those days we were CEOs. Those 90 days.

Our eyes said it all but we didn't make eye contact. So the lunch was over and I got in my van and drove around San Diego County, CA, on the 54 and the 56 and the 52.

—

Biology is a good subject. So is chemistry. So is physics. So are trumpets. So are snare drums. So are guitars. So are vampires. So are mummies. So are werewolves. But what is the werewolf between snare drums and guitars? And what is the trumpet between biology and physics? This is a mystery for me to unload on you, the outpouring, catharsis, bloody cough of my soul.

—

Whatever I say, you hear what I say and reflect it back to me. It seems like when I'm around you, I have to face myself. I have to know that I exist. I don't mind other people existing, it's my own existence I'm not so sure about.

—

I got in a lot of trouble by acting according to what I really thought and desired rather than the dictates of society. It seems that acting on your beliefs is honorable, but acting on your desires is not. But strangely, a lot of people are rewarded for acting on their desires, and punished for acting on their beliefs.

Rapid transit systems are the blessing of life. San Diego County's Metropolitan Transit System (which owns, maintains, and runs the public transportation in San Diego County, CA) has three rapid transit lines, and a few what are called Bus Rapid Transit routes. I personally prefer the electrically-powered trains which are called The Trolley, which take me places. You think I still have a van? That was years ago. It's the 1980s now, and there are only two rapid transit lines, and I ride from the border to La Mesa, CA, and from La Mesa, CA to the border, back and forth, over and over.

You were with me the other night when we were hanging out by the beach. I held your hand and we looked out at the waves. I felt nothing, but I let you hold my hand, because I liked you for other reasons, and it's not that I wanted you to be close, like I was worried you would leave, it's not that it made sense as a goal (though it does), it's just something I did, without motiva-

tion or meaning. You can see my motivation or meaning, but I know there is none.

There's a swing which connects to this branch (named Valladolid), a swing which sways a little way down there, a branch which connects to the larger branch Xianjiang, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

The security camera caught me breaking into the store, taking the food and jewels, and this is why I'm here on trial. They're trying to find out if I'm innocent or guilty, and I want to scream "I DID IT!" in the most eye-averting, quiet, non-confrontational way. But my defense attorney has a shock collar on me when I start to open my mouth, and my face contorts in bizarre ways: all this so that I can get a plea bargain.

Nowadays, in the 1980s, I have a cat. She's got black and white fur. My cat is like Rollercoaster Park. I don't love her and I don't hate her and I'm not indifferent to her. She's my cat.

I come home after a hard day of work, and she's meowing at me. So I get her some food, and relax as I read the comics. There's this new

woman cartoonist named Jackie Q. She's running right next to Lynn Johnston and Cathy Guisewite. Jackie's comics are like Rollercoaster Park. They aren't funny, nor are they not-funny. They're just her comics. I don't take particular notice of them. I don't know why I'm mentioning them to you. I guess it's been a long day at work.

As I'm turning to the sports section, my cat comes over to me and rubs up against my legs. I pick her up and put her on my lap but after 1 second she loses interest and walks away. That's life, I guess. Not that people lose interest in me, but that things happen, lots of things happen, when they do, as they do.

I get up and close the window because it's getting chilly (even in Lakeside, an unincorporated community in inland East San Diego County, CA). Then I turn on the TV and sink down into the comfort of the night.

—

Today is a day of intensity. That is, everything is intense around me, but I'm just sinking down into my day, hoping that I don't have to do too much before it's over. I'm here at work, barely concentrating on what I'm doing, waiting for a new customer to come through, hoping that none will come because each customer is someone I'm not sure I can muster up the attention to address, but getting bored and restless in the

waiting time nonetheless. Each customer has some problem which is particularly intense. They want me to fix an engine that's on fire, or process a lot of very important coupons.

I'm just saying this so you understand why I'm not meeting your eye. I like meeting your eye, but to me you don't exist today. I'm 100% pre-occupied — with nothing, it seems. You understand this, but I know it's hard on you. You have to wait through this part of our friendship, and you get bored and restless, so terribly bored and restless. I'm being intense, by not talking to you. It's an intense day for me, and so, now, it's an intense day for you.

Holly came over to my house in Lakeside. She likes my cat, so I let her play with her. We had some food, I don't remember what now, probably something like macaroni and cheese. I make macaroni and cheese out of macaroni and cheese.

We slumped down on the couch in the living room, watching TV. We murmured to each other our reactions to what we saw. I told her I loved her but she knew I was joking. I would never love her again, not after what happened in the 1970s.

I was at a Padres game the other night (the

Padres are a baseball team based in San Diego County, CA). I drank water and ate peanuts. I was by myself, reading the newspaper between events on the field, working on a short story. The short story is about a fly who wakes up to find he has been transformed in his rubbish heap into an enormous human. He finds himself intensely disgusted by everything around him, but he can't move to leave it. He has no initiative.

I slept on a Murphy bed last night at the house of my friends in LA. Were they yuppies? Hippies? I don't know, but I know they have a house. My friends consist of two roommates, Joe and Alicia, who are married to each other. I like those two Angelenos ("Angeleno" is a name applied to residents of Los Angeles, or, perhaps often enough, to residents of other parts of the Greater Los Angeles area). I didn't like the Murphy bed, though, it was uncomfortable.

I can smell someone smoking a hookah. People just walk around smoking hookahs on the street. Back when I was younger, people smoked on the street, they smoked cigarettes. And as a non-smoker, that made a certain amount of sense. Cigarettes are light and fit in a person's pocket. But nowadays, in the 1980s, people walk around with their hookahs. I think a thing in the 1980s, at least in San Diego County, CA, is to try to

make things more interesting and cumbersome,
to take on burdens.

I think I can understand this trend, but hookah-
carrying is not the way I would go to live a more
burdened life. But to each his or her or its own,
as the saying went and now is. Arbitrarily doing
more work than you have to will always take on
randomly different, inexplicable forms.

I felt my skin burning and looked up to see a
crazed yet morally culpable man training a laser
on my arm. I quickly activated my involuntary
reflexes and moved my arm to safety. Then I
left the room.

Sand is running between the pilings which are
mounted in this wide, deep branch, and crabs
run sideways, not realizing they are arriving
where they began on this branch named Po'opo
which connects to the greater branch Xianjiang,
which itself connects to the nameless trunk of
the tree with unimaginable roots.

My brother and I were sitting in a diner up in
Alpine, CA (which is an unincorporated commu-
nity located as high as 2,000 feet above sea level
but not too far from El Cajon, after all), after

having walked around his property, looking for snakes. By the 1980s, we have become retired men, in our 40s, and we have nothing to do except to look around. Wealth has served us well, allowing us to live a lifestyle which, I think, in 1991, would be called “post-historical”, here in post-historical California, the state which is located on the west coast of the United States of America, south of Washington state and Oregon.

What does anything matter? I’m picking up the things I left on the floor of my apartment, putting them back on the shelf: my books, my Warhammer 40,000 figurines, my smiling Asian waving good luck cat, my little plastic tubs.

It’s a good night. I’m getting things in order. I have energy. I’ve been so depressed recently. I’ve been sinking down on the carpeted floor, lying on my mattress, listening to the radio which I hate and turn off, thinking somehow that the objects which I enjoyed as a younger man would satisfy me now, but they don’t. I lie on my mattress and stare at the ceiling, at the patterns in the popcorn, but they don’t register, they don’t fill my heart with joy. Somehow I am depressed again, lying here. Maybe I should get up and make myself do something. But what?

My brother and I ride our bikes over the hum-

mocks of dirt on his property out near Alpine, CA. It's pretty good exercise, and we quietly remark how good it was afterward, sitting at the diner in town, getting all the calories back.

Some nights I just lie in my bathtub for two hours, and these are either my most pleasurable, warm nights, or my most depressed, sunken-in nights.

I've kept track of everything you've said, and I think that's the problem. I let in too much, and even remember too much, that I can't manage to put everything you've said together in a coherent way. I guess I'd talk to you to get some clarity, but then all those words you would say would add to what I'd heard. But the new words would help me not look at the old words. Maybe that's how these friendship things work. The only way to get relief from a relationship is to relate, which ironically only serves to perpetuate the relationship. But that's okay. Maybe this is how we will live forever.

A hawk flew by and I looked up at it and identified it because it had a red tail. "That's a red-tailed hawk" I said. I used to go bird-watching with Joe and Alicia, when they lived in San

Marcos, CA, which is located between Ocean-side, CA and Escondido, CA, in what residents of San Diego County, CA call North County. We would go out to Lake Hodges or Lake Wohlford. Sometimes it would get pretty hot out there, but we drank water, so we were alright. We also wore sunscreen. Not Alicia, though, because she is African-American, otherwise known as “black” (actually, she is brown-skinned). Yes, ultraviolet light can damage the skin of anyone, but the European-Americans Joe and I had much less latency here, were forced much closer and pre-rationally against the grindstone of “reality”.

Sometimes I think that everything I do is worthless. I’m fine, I’m not worthless. But what I make is worthless. Everything that I take delight in is nothing, or worse. I’m living in a river, I’m walking on a branch, eating and then forgetting each of the aphids.

I’m not angry anymore. I used to be angry, but not anymore. I spent all my time writing letters to the editor of the *San Diego Union* (one of the two main newspapers serving San Diego County, CA in the 1980s). I wanted to make things better. I felt like, pre-rationally, it was just wrong that things were so terribly mismanaged. Why in the name of all that is holy (which impresses

itself on me pre-rationally) does our city not have a strong mayor system, and instead relies on a city manager? No one could explain this to me, no matter how hard they tried, no matter how good their arguments were.

I was angry for so long, thinking that there was such a thing as things deserving each other. I was driven, I was pre-rational. I was not content. I found myself having to disengage from my instincts. I am becoming peaceful and mature.

—

I'm lying down on the branch below, feeling the branch on my chest, clinging to it and balancing, this branch named Vittorini, which connects to the larger branch Xianjiang, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

—

I get cut off in the middle of things, so I can't get my thoughts out completely. I am used to this, but I find myself with strange momentums in me, which don't have the chance to play out, and which therefore leave me all awirl inside, all confused and without energy, all the momentums sloshing each other like waves in a bathtub.

But here I am, sitting at the table with my friends, with Holly, Joe, Alicia, my brother, and

you, and we're all playing a game of Trivial Pursuit, some of us getting the answers right, others of us getting them wrong. It's the 1980s, and we have read our encyclopedias, and watched our televisions and read our newspapers. And then we are done, one of us having won, so to speak, and we sit around wondering what to do. We are young to be so old as we are, we have no children at home, we pass the time talking late into the night. And I feel so strange afterward, drained and aching, like I've heard you all speaking all your pain, the way you say it by having a good time in its despite.

I was playing miniature golf one afternoon, just passing the time on a Saturday, relaxing. I like being out in nature, being around the soft breeze playing through the windmill, moving the giant log back and forth over the hole. I like the quiet concentration of calculating in my head the ricochets which will be the fate of my ball once I launch it with the right momentum at the right angle. I like miniature golf, and I wonder why I go so seldom, and why I don't seem to have any friends who want to go with me.

What would the world be like if it were overflowing with novelty and resources? I don't know. I can tell that the 1980s are a fast path to the grave and that now that I'm in my 40s, I'm over

the hill myself. There will nothing new be brought forth in the world. The 1990s will be a settling in for the final nap.

My brother and I meet at a coffeeshop in a neighborhood somewhere and have something to drink, each of us a different drink, and speak about certain topics. Then we leave and go home and do things to relax, each of us in our separate homes, doing different things which never come up in conversation.

I heard a mourning dove coo outside my window the day that I heard you were sick. I thought about that mourning dove, who I was sure was sitting on the wire outside my apartment. I thought about how she (I thought of the bird as a she) was looking out, one way or another, north or south, letting the day go by.

I got your call and went over to the hospital after work. You were doing well, looking one way or another. You were sick but you were doing well, I thought. And then after a few days you were released.

The President (of the United States of America, which is not a parliamentary democracy) was on

the television the other night, and I slumped even deeper into my couch cushions in comfort, in my house in Lakeside, CA. The President was a good man who had a hard job. He was saying that the United States was going to end the world for democracy, and I felt like that was okay. I was okay with how things were going to turn out, because this man was our president. Things can be okay in the end in various different ways, whether with utopia, with moral character, or with a good man saying the right things about how things are, conveying through his radiant, superficial trustworthiness just exactly how trustworthy our final state is.

My pet cat and my pet rabbit (yes, I have a pet rabbit, too) were a little bit suspicious of each other at first, but they came to understand each other better as time went on. I think this is encouraging, as far as the state of the world goes. If only someone comes to force us to live in the same house, feeds us, separates us at the proper moments and brings us together, then eventually, though we had been of different species, we will eventually come to tolerate each other.

But is my cat really happy with a rabbit, and not a cat? And is my rabbit really happy with the cat, and not another rabbit? I think about this, but it doesn't move me. The household exists according to my purposes, my pets are my pets because I say so, because we are living out

my vision.

—

Umbilical cords are often, or at least sometimes, wrapped around baby mammals as they are born. Somebody has to cut the cord fast, or else the baby can develop problems such as asphyxiation. The umbilical cord is a good thing for a while, but after birth, things change. It is a little strange in the two and a half years after you move on to still have that umbilical cord trailing behind you.

—

My neighbor is a Rastafari and he still talks about what happened back in the 1970s in Jamaica, when Haile Selassie came down out of the plane and did not disclaim his deity. My neighbor is Hispanic (in particular, Mexican-American) and grew up Catholic. He is quiet, always watching what goes on in the neighborhood, keeping track of things. He keeps me up to date on what things happen. I don't know what he does for a living and I have never asked. (That's probably the reason I don't know.)

—

Things are never the same when you're gone. You have no idea. You never could know, not really, because you're not here. So I guess it wouldn't bother you too much.

I sometimes have a hard time understanding that you have a life outside the time we are together. How could I have that concept? You are either that being who shows up only in one context, or that being who only exists with me in the room. I know this is a delusion, but it's hard to shake.

A snake pulled a rat out of the ground outside my house in Lakeside, CA. Why didn't it eat it?, I thought. Maybe the rat wasn't good to eat, but reminded the snake of someone it knew.

I caught myself in the mirror making a face I learned how to make from the "facing" of Holly. Holly was like a folk musician, teaching her repertoire to whomever could face her. And I wondered if after all these years (after all, we broke up in the 1970s), it was time to start clamping down on those old things, cutting them so that I could be myself in the 1980s.

I don't collect junk, I collect valuable things which turn into junk.

I usually write letters by hand, but I got out my old typewriter to write my family newsletter. My newsletter is something I send out to my family, to Joe and Alicia and Holly and you. I don't have a lot of friends, but that's okay, that means that when I type, I can just use two sheets of carbon paper for each sheet I type, and then I only have three copies to personalize with little notes in the ink of a ballpoint pen, written on the margin.

The youths below are singing as I sit on the branch called Undine, connecting to the greater branch Xianjiang, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

GUADALQUIVIR

I ate something last night that disagreed with me. So I was up all night long, going to the bathroom. I thought “How lucky I am. Overall. But not right now.”

Once upon a time, an apple fell from a tree and began to rot. Some small animals came and ate the rotting flesh of the apple. There wasn't anything wrong with this, it was just something that happened. I learned about this situation because I went out walking, and saw the rotting, half-eaten core.

I woke up one morning, in Coronado, CA, and loaded up my van and set out for the desert. I drove over the mountains and went out in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, which is located in the north-eastern part of San Diego County, CA. I drove to a likely place and settled in. I had a lot of water and some food. I got out of the van and walked around.

Why was I in the desert? I think it makes sense to let things choose you sometimes. The desert chose me, it chose me through a feeling of dryness inside. The desert whispered to me, “My

son, you have no place in the world, there is nothing for you to do. Life is empty and you have no part in anything you believe.” And I said “Desert, I hear your loving call. I will come to you as soon as I load up a lot of water and get some food and some gas.”

I was pretty happy out in the desert. Not much happened, and I was left with my dry, disconnected thoughts. I was happy because my surroundings matched my inner state. That is one of the ways of happiness. When I’m feeling sad, I listen to sad music, and then I am happy. Happiness is a link between a person and their experiences. With the sad music on a sad day, there is the inner representation of the outer sadness, which reflects the sadness inside oneself as a reflection back onto oneself. It is not a perfect reflection, so you are not alone with yourself. Instead, under the level of consciousness, what is outside connects with what is inside.

I know that was all a complicated thing to say. Don’t worry. It’s OK. I’m happy.

One time I went to the store looking for some essential items. There were three essential items I wanted: a highlighter, toenail clippers, and a pair of flip flops. I could easily explain this occasion by saying I was in college, but in fact, I

was not.

I walked around the store trying to find each item, and I had found all I needed, except for the toenail clippers. And the fluorescent lighting and the gentle hum of the store lulled me and emptied my mind, and I had achieved what some people call “Pure Being”. Then, after 40 minutes, the store employee came up to me and said “Can I help you?” I think people don’t always know what to do with someone experiencing Pure Being.

One time I grew corn in my backyard. I had this little dirt yard behind my cheap apartment, and I thought, well, why not? One good thing about an underdeveloped apartment is that there’s no grass to rip up. So I grew some corn. I got a good yield, for how much land I was cultivating, but it wasn’t really any better than the corn from the store.

It felt good to be out in the desert, after all the stress of being a CEO. Sometimes you just have to get away from it all, and golf isn’t even far enough. But after a few days I was getting kind of restless, so I drove into El Centro, CA (the county seat of Imperial County, which is the county located just east of San Diego County, CA), to get reception on my cell phone, and

called up my direst competitor, my brother, with whom I am on friendly terms. Our companies will respectively run each other out of business, one of us will ruin the other one, but we love the process of competition so much, the holy logic which is capitalism's virtue, that if one must die from her smiling hand, so it must be, and we will smile back — one of us will. We could have competed over women, as brothers, but we set our sights elsewhere, we set our sights on economic power and glory.

My brother brings his RV and his quads out with him and we go out to Glamis (which is a dunefield in Imperial County, CA), and we ride around on the sand. He feels the stress melt away, and I feel excitement and stimulation. A perfect medicine, which treats two different diseases.

—

I was throwing up all morning and that's not exactly the worst thing. I could have been at work, after all. But I think I can manage to be at work week after week, but I'd have a hard time throwing up all morning week after week. I guess that's the way with a lot of things that seem better than other things.

—

Am I a vegetarian? I don't remember. Out here in the desert, I feel like all the rules of the city

aren't present. The rules are different. It's okay. When you don't care, how can you be bound to what caring bound you to? This is part of why I am so happy out in the desert. I feel a fascination with the wildlife here in the desert. I think of hunting small animals, but then I consider that the park regulations probably prohibit that, so I have some beans and rice instead.

Groups of people drive by on the county road, which I can see at a distance. (I think the road might be called S2, but I'm not sure. S2 is a road that goes through the desert.)

I wonder why they have come out into the desert. Are they looking for happiness? I don't know that they'll find it, any more than if they were to go to San Diego County's finest water park.

I was on trial once, and the defense attorney told me "Don't say anything, I'll handle all of this". And then when it was time for me to take the stand, I was confused, and started to get up to get escorted, but the attorney said "No, no, I'll take this one. You've had a hard life." and the defense attorney went up to the stand and confessed to the crime. "I'm the man you really want," he said. And based on his testimony, he

was sentenced, but the thing is, I was innocent the whole time (and I have to assume, so was the attorney), so the real killer roams free...

I think about this out in the desert, how maybe this guy would be out in the desert, living by his wits, hunting desert hares. But more likely he's just blending into society.

I wanted to know what happened to my defense attorney, but nobody had any record that he had ever existed.

—

A lazy bird does absolutely nothing on this branch, which is called Istvan, which itself connects to the great branch Guadalquivir, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

—

So I was wondering, now that I live in the desert full-time, maybe I should, first, get some shade put up, and second, think of something fulfilling to do out here which will help me to pass the time.

So after I drove into El Centro and got some supplies, and drove back out, and set things up, I felt pretty good about my shelter, and I thought that I could hang out in my shelter and then think about what to do with myself.

I listened for many afternoons, interrupted only by my trips to the store to get food or water or whatever. One of the perks of being a recently retired CEO is that you can afford to spend the rest of your life in the desert.

But the desert never told me what to do. After my call to the desert, of course it would tell me nothing. I was in the desert! So I thought, hmm, maybe listening is the wrong thing to do. So I left my shelter and walked around in the crepuscular coolness, and that seemed to do me some good. I was experiencing Pure Being, for short flashes, and yet, I wasn't fooled. I was in the desert.

I looked at the desert birds, plucking food off of plants, perching on plant-limbs. Those birds were always at work. Were they cheerful? Was their life meaningful? I felt a feeling of love for them, as they experienced their realities, their purposefulnesses, I don't know why I loved them for that because people are the same way.

—

Out here in the desert, I wonder where I would get water if my van broke down. I walk around and find a spring, but it mostly just looks like a bunch of little trees. They call it a spring, but I don't really see a whole lot of running water. Okay, I can work with this. Since I live here in the desert full-time.

It's been a few months and we've left the summertime (the summer of surfing which I left to surf itself in Coronado) and now the fall is falling into winter. I still don't have a purpose, but now, because it's getting colder, I have to find some way to keep warm at night. It's not too bad, I just end up going into town and getting a sleeping bag, and I sleep in my van.

One time the ranger came to tell me that I was camping out here too long, but then I explained that I was a retired CEO with a lot of money, and perhaps I could endow a special chair in the department of Letting Someone Stay Out in the Desert All the Time. I could make the donation anonymously, of course.

A tortoise wandered out in search for desert grasses. That's what he felt like that day, so that's what he was going to get. He didn't think about time or eternity, nor of goals or practicality. He just looked around, slowly, experiencing the day. He didn't get a lot done, but his metabolism wasn't too fast, so he was okay.

One night, a monsoon storm came up from the Sea of Cortez (also known as the Gulf of California, this is a body of water which is a finger of the Pacific Ocean reaching up toward Arizona, but which doesn't quite make it, instead surrounded on all sides by Mexico. We may say that Arizona never made it to the Sea of Cortez, for the Sea was there far longer-ago than Arizona). The storm was a thunderstorm, violent, heavy, powerful. There was a great wonderful flood of water washing through the desert, and it was purely by chance that I had chosen the somewhat higher ground, and so I was lucky to not get washed away.

That sense of good luck lasted for exactly one week, and then it went away because time had passed.

—

I never saw a caribou in the desert, which I think is appropriate. Why would I see a caribou in the desert? But I did see a ghost.

It was Jackie, I think, 100 meters away. It's possible to mistake people at a distance, so it might not have been her. I walked as fast as I dared around the cactuses until I reached where she had been, but there was nothing there but desert night air (cold and dry), and the smell of perfume. In life, Jackie never did and never would have worn perfume. And so in death, it is interesting that she would have taken up that habit.

One time I went on a road trip through the Adirondacks. (That's a mountain range accessible from New York City.) This was back when I lived in New York City. The road trip was with some friends from college. I think maybe we were in college at the time. We looked out at the leaves on the trees, up in the mountains. I remember nothing else about the Adirondacks.

My code name was "Blue Lightning", and I wore it well. It was given to me by the desert as I looked out one night, thinking blankly and unmoved of my fate of not getting washed away in that storm. I don't know why the desert told me that. The desert is profound, and has a dry sense of humor.

I sweated a lot during the year that I lived in the desert. I went into town and would go to Camacho's and eat a giant chili relleno plate, or even two, not just for the calories, and for the time spent under that bizarre luxury of air conditioning, but also in order to take in all the salt. Once I realized I was doing that, I brought saltier foods out to the desert, and didn't go to Camacho's as often. Which was a shame.

Imperial County, CA has been losing a lot of jobs, I guess because San Diego County, CA has been taking its water, so it can't keep as many fields in production. Nobody really seems to care about this in San Diego County, which makes sense, because nobody cares about anything. I think this trend will even continue until no one cares about their own well-being, but only in San Diego County, CA. In Imperial County, people will watch what they value crumble away.

I'm eating a sandwich of cheddar cheese and vegetables here on this branch called Rostov, which connects to the greater branch Guadalquivir, which connects to the nameless branch of the tree with unimaginable roots.

Cores of apples, everywhere, surrounding my little spot on the corner of the street. I just eat apples. That's what I do. There's a flow to my life. Every morning, I go down to the market and buy I don't know maybe 10 apples. Then I walk over to the corner of 4th and some other street here in Chula Vista, CA. This is my favorite corner, the one I always sit at. And I sit here eating apples all day long. I start with the first apple, and then when I'm done with that,

sit for a while and watch the traffic go by, and then start on the second apple, and then as time goes on, move on to the third. Then I tend to start on the fourth, but sometimes I skip ahead to the fifth and go back to the fourth but then after that I have to have the sixth. That all makes it sound like there isn't always flow, but there is flow, on another level. My life is going down the drain.

One time Holly came out to the desert. I showed her that spring which is just a bunch of plants. There were some bees there and Holly wanted to stay well away from them. I don't blame her, or judge her.

Holly left as it was getting dark, and I sat in my van, thinking.

Well, I was thinking that my time in the desert should come to an end, but when I tried to leave, I thought to myself "What's the point?" Was that my thought, or the desert's thought in me? It doesn't really matter, it's true (in the sense that, there is no point).

People think that I'm wasting my talents out here in the desert. Like I should be going back to the town and being alive there. They may be right. Maybe I should go back to being a CEO. I made a lot of money there. And I think that means I was doing good things for society. I mean, maybe not. I don't know. I just know that the CEO thing wasn't for me.

I found some dinosaur bones out here in the desert. I was digging down by the spring which is just a bunch of bushes, wondering if I could find the water table. As I was digging, I hit a rock formation. I wasn't really sure if the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park was in a dinosaur-fossil-rich area, but I was hopeful. And for all that the desert is about dissatisfaction, I found dinosaur bones immediately. But then they just seemed like dinosaur bones.

One night, I made a fire. It was pretty easy, I just piled up the wood in a ring of rocks I'd put together, and poured lighter fluid on it, and lit it up with a match. It got going pretty good, and I thought "This is the life. This is why I'm in the desert."

I thought about the mountains. Was I going to

go up to the mountains after the desert? I didn't know. There's no way to know this kind of thing. The desert stretches on endlessly. There's no end to it. If I find myself up in the mountains someday, I'll have no idea that I got there, and there will be no way down.

In the trunk of my van, I have a box full of old letters I used to receive. This was back in the days before the Internet, back when I used to write letters to people. Because I wrote letters to them, they wrote back to me. I have all these letters, and I go back and read through them. Just something to do while I'm out in the desert.

A rabbit and an owl both went by my van while I lay there feeling sick. How did I get sick? I think I must have picked up a flu when I was in town. This is one of the downsides of the desert, that there's nobody out here to take care of you.

Sometimes I just stop and do nothing and sit on the ground, whether in the heat of day or the chill of night. Then I figure I might as well get up and walk around.

One time I experienced Pure Being out in the desert and it was as awesome as everyone says it is. And then, while it was going, it wasn't for me anymore, and it was just Pure Being and I was still in the desert.

I'm hiding in the office of my own company. Shh! I have to be very quiet, and so do you. I'm waiting here to see if anyone misses me, now that I'm in the desert. They talk about whatever, and yeah, they miss me. They're afraid that my brother will buy them out now that I'm gone. What kind of market will there be if my brother can consolidate it? What will happen to all the competition? Prices will rise as extra managers are hired and shareholders (my brother is the chief shareholder) just pile up stupid profits that they don't really appreciate. And my brother will have to do this, but if I was there, I could keep him in check. I am touched to hear this, but my reality is simply that being a CEO wasn't for me, and neither is anything else, but I'm pretty sure something will come up.

Resting is an important activity that all of us practice, all of us. That's fine, whatever, resting, resting, resting, I don't care.

I get kind of tired of eating the same stuff out in the desert. Isn't that strange? Shouldn't it actually make me happy instead? Hold on. I think I'm going to try to adjust my rose-colored glasses. I think monotonous food is going to make me happy from now on.

I find myself growing tired earlier and earlier every night. I guess this is fine because it's that part of the fall where the days get shorter and shorter really fast. But I sleep about the same amount every night, so I'm waking up earlier and earlier, and it's dark and cold and there's nothing to do. So I just walk around my van, and look up at the stars in the sky, or the moon, when it's out, and nothing happens. And this is kind of a burden for me, and I think, "Why don't I go through a beach experience instead? Feel mellow, say hello to attractive women, experience Pure Being?" But the desert called me.

I stand on the branch called *Erwachsene*, barely balancing, thinking about whatever branches there are besides this one, branching off of the great branch *Guadalquivir*, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

My brother and I rode our all-terrain vehicles up and down the dunes at Glamis. We could feel all of the hot desert air turning into stress around us. It was a nightmare, a glorious nightmare.

We were high on something, on heat, on stress, it was a desert afternoon on a hot day. The lizards lightnined their way across the rocks as we rode back across Imperial County, CA, made our way back across empty fields to Anza-Borrego.

We talked business when we got back, over cups of coffee and the glowing embers of the fire. He was talking about retiring, too. I told him it was the best decision of my life, I told him that life was never better. The desert has drugs which make you think that you have purpose. I thought my purpose was to sit out in the desert, or ride all-terrain vehicles on the dunes at Glamis. This is something the desert told me, and I believed it.

My brother sat down with his appointment book and said, "So when do you want to come by my office, so we can talk business again?" And I thought that maybe going back into business was my calling, that I should quit living in the desert. But then I realized that it was the desert that was telling me that, it wasn't business that was telling me that. Business was telling me to go to the desert, so if I didn't have the desert anymore, what would keep me in busi-

ness? I explained my dilemma to my brother and he said, “Maybe you could telecommute, like work out here in the desert”. And I thought that kind of made sense. He said “How about this, how about we both run our companies, and sometimes I’ll come out to the desert and we can play golf or something and we can talk things over, but most of the time we’ll be doing our own things. But instead of being competitors, let’s be cooperators. Let’s cooperate on bringing our customers the lowest possible prices, and also treat the environment right, and also come out with good features that the customers really need to live better lives. How does that sound?”

I thought it over and then said, “Yeah, I think that makes sense.”

And he left and I was sitting there, out in the desert, thinking I had probably made a mistake. I was missing out on what the desert really offered, I was getting back into business. I didn’t really want to telecommute, to be an eCEO. But I couldn’t see any other reality than what he offered. And I had already agreed to what he was talking about. It seemed so simple when we were talking, and here I was, alone, just me and the dry night air.

I really wanted to talk to someone who might understand where I was coming from. So I prayed to God that Pauline would visit me. (I didn’t think God would understand.)

For two weeks, I heard nothing from anyone. Then my brother came by with a laptop and a satellite hookup. "This is just some old equipment we had lying around. For when you go back to work." And he was busy negotiating some deals and left.

Then, two weeks later, I was lying in my sleeping bag, and I heard a scratching at my van window. I looked and I saw Pauline there, her face vaguely horror-seeing. I was terrified and got up with joy and opened the window so I could get a better look. "Pauline!" I said, my blood turning to ice and my heart swelling. "You came!"

"Yes." she said "God told me what you wanted and I made an effort to come out here."

"Pauline, you must understand the desert experience."

"Yes, we do understand the desert. To be a ghost is to never be able to connect with the world of flesh."

"How does it feel to be in the desert all the time?"

"It feels like it is the way that things need to be, even the fact that as ghosts, we are always dissatisfied. To be dissatisfied is the way things need to be."

"Would you be happy if you were satisfied?"

“No. It is enough for us to exist.”

“Do you ever have times where you connect more with flesh?”

“No, we are incapable of that, although there is a part of us that desires vividness and obviousness, a part that has to be what it is.”

“Do you ever wish that you could connect with fleshly people?”

“Yes.”

“But you can talk to me, so you can connect.”

“The living are made of flesh and spirit. It is jarring for me to talk to you in your vividness and obviousness, but I connect to the quiet part of you, the dry part of you. I trust it, just as you should.”

“Okay, so here we are talking. So, I have a dilemma. I have business that I left, because the desert was calling me.”

“Yes.”

“And now I feel like I need to go back to business, because it seems like that’s what I’m supposed to do. It’s the thing that’s in front of me, and it seems like that’s what the desert is saying I should do. Should I do it? I have come to love

the desert. Business is just going to send me back to the desert.”

“Wouldn’t that be a good thing? You would go back to the desert you love.”

“I guess so. But somehow I know that that dance, between business and desert, is ‘off.’”

“You are correct. Ghosts, who have died, are freed from the illusions of the seesaw between, in your case, ‘business’ or whatever it is for us individually, and the desert. We are confronted, constantly, with the fact that the desert which we knew as living people was itself an illusion, and the real desert goes beyond it. Our desire for the desert was filled by the desert, and so it was not the greatest desert. The greatest desert is where we live, as ghosts, and we are dry for a water which has never been revealed.”

“Can God bring us this water?”

“No. God is the one who makes us thirsty and never fills us. — I’m speaking of us ghosts. I don’t know about living people. The dead are made fully dry, and when they are woken up for service, they are deeply thirsty. The job of the dead is to take the false life out of the living. False life is worse than death.”

“Okay, clearly you know something about all this. What should I do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you have any advice that you could give to help me, in any way?”

“No.”

“Okay.”

“Even though it took me a long time to come out here, I have to leave soon. So, is there anything else you want to talk about?”

We talked about old topics, and the conversation came around to Jackie.

“I thought I saw her out here in the desert one night.”

“That is possible.”

“What was she doing out here?”

“I think maybe she was fighting another spirit.”

“Was she protecting me?”

“She might have been.”

“I noticed when I went to where I had seen her, I smelled perfume.”

“Okay. Maybe she loves you.”

“Maybe?”

“Maybe.”

I thought about this, and I didn't think any of our interactions, in life, fit that assessment. But maybe when ghosts are in love, it's like when people are just friends with each other.

I asked Pauline if she had ever been in love.

“Yes, I am in love with someone. He is far away.”

“What's it like for you?”

“He's like a bird, what he says is like a bird song.”

“A bird song? Beautiful and heart-warming?”

“No. Birdsongs are not heart-warming. They are just the sounds that animals make.”

“Is there something about him that makes his birdsong more special to you?”

“He is the only bird to me, everyone else is either a ghost who has a message of eternity, or a human who speaks of flesh and illusions.”

“Is he a literal, physical bird?”

“No. He is a human being.”

“Do I know him?”

“No. He is far away from you.”

“What’s he like?”

“He is a teenage boy in a faraway country.”

“What kind of teenager is he?”

“He is not as inquisitive as you.”

“Is there something odd about being in love with a teenage boy?”

“No.”

“Okay, so if Jackie was in love with me, what would that mean?”

“She would think of you often and hope that you would be true to your best self.”

“Would she be more likely to see me?”

“Maybe. You saw her here in the desert.”

“Would I see her if I was a businessman again?”

“Maybe.”

“Would she be able to tell me if I was doing the right thing, if I was becoming who I should be?”

“Yes. Ghosts are spirits and souls. She loves you for the best in you, not for where you are now. If she loves you.”

“So that’s why you don’t have advice for me...”

“Ghosts are finite beings. We know who we want the other person to become.”

“Is this because you will be completed by the other person?”

“No. We are shown how to become who we should be but we have to be shown by an image. We attach to people for human reasons because we are human dead, but we must attach to the people who will show us how to become ourselves. We can sense this, as ghosts, because we are so dry. Dryness can pick up the faintest moisture, and though we cannot pick up any moisture, we can feel the attraction.”

“So she would have a personal stake in me becoming my best self?”

“Yes. And so if you ever see her again, you will ask her whom to become, and maybe she will have an answer.”

“I see that you need to go.”

“Yes, you have become attuned to me.”

“Okay. Well, it’s been good to see you.”

“Yes. Thank you for existing.”

“You really mean it?”

“Yes.”

And she vanished away.

—

It is too late tonight, sitting with my back to the enormous twig on the branch-reality of Kisan-gani, which connects to the staggering branch Guadalquivir, which connects to the nameless trunk-universe of the tree with unimaginable roots.

SALAMANCA

Everyone is a good friend of mine, when I walk around the parking lot here at the beach in Coronado, CA. Sometimes I drive over to the lot on the other side of the peninsula (also known as an island) and see how things are on the Pacific side. It's all the same, everybody likes me.

How did I get to being so popular? It's possible that I handed out candy to people. Everybody likes candy. But that was a phase I went through a long time ago. I think by now it's mainly word of mouth.

I've talked to a lot of people in my time. "Hey, how's it going?" I say to the beautiful women in bikinis. "Enjoying a nice day?" They confirm. I choose words which work, which correspond with reality.

Other times I see a family getting out of their car, with boogie boards or whatever. "Hey there," I say.

They smile and wave. They know me. They've heard about me through word of mouth.

I've only made one enemy in my time here. I didn't realize it, but I accidentally used this guy's surfboard. I thought it was my surfboard,

but when I took it back to my van, I saw that my surfboard was in my van the whole time. His surfboard looked just like my surfboard. So I went back to the beach where I'd found "my" (that is, his) surfboard and put it back where I found it. But as I looked up, just after setting it down, I saw him come up. And I tried to explain what happened, but he didn't believe me. He believed me, but he didn't believe me. So it's like I have an enemy, here in the parking lots of the beaches of Coronado, CA.

Sharks are well-known for being stupid and aggressive. I've had my shark moments, now and again. One time I had my company, the one I was a CEO of, if that's an elegant way to put it, devour another company, buy it out in a hostile takeover, just to see things happen. I know that it was a good time for me to get out of business, because shark companies are going out of business, because all these new tech companies are just as rabidly aggressive, but they're smarter. So I know it was a good time to get out. Who knows what people will do with technology.

Trees are good. I like sitting under trees, all afternoon long. I don't get out to the mountains too often, but when I do, I look for an oak tree to sit under. Maybe I'll realize something, while I'm sitting under the oak tree.

I was thinking about Jackie the other day. I think about her maybe two or three times a week. Not like Alicia. Alicia... man... I haven't thought of her in years.

Am I young, am I old? I'm not sure. I was playing hacky sack in a parking lot near the beach in Imperial Beach. I'm not too bad at it. So then, I guess I'm kind of old. It takes time to get good at hacky sack. But then, maybe I'm kind of young, because hacky sack is something that most people give up about the same time they give up skateboarding. I'm not saying that if you do hacky sack or skateboard when you're older, that that means you're immature. I'm just saying you have a connection to your youth.

I'm kind of washed out right now. I think it's just the old day. Days get old, they're kind of young, but they get old. I think maybe I should have drunk more water. I have some half-drunk water bottles in my van. I know that sounds funny, like they've just each had a beer. Maybe they have each had a beer, for all I know. I've been out surfing all afternoon. They taste kind of funny, like algae. Maybe water gets drunk on algae instead of alcohol. "Algae" and "alcohol"

both start with “al”. Just an observation.

I’m collapsing under a tree near a shopping center on H St. There’s nothing interesting about the street, here in Chula Vista, CA, but it does have a shopping center nearby. But the trees are in their own world, between the buildings of the shopping center and the street. So nobody really talks to me, until the police come. I’m not responsive, and they realize that I’ve passed out. They call the paramedics and I wake up in the hospital. I guess I just got dehydrated out there, wandering around in the heat. This kind of thing happens. I think I was also low on blood sugar because I hadn’t eaten in a while. So they gave me IV drips of dextrose and electrolytes. And eventually I was feeling good. And I thought about those trees.

Trust is a good thing, I think, most of the time, unless you trust something that will turn out to betray you. I think it’s okay to live your life trusting things, until they betray you. Sometimes you get betrayed and then later you feel better and you go back to the thing or person that betrayed you. I’ve heard it said that if you come back to someone who’s had drama with you, that your relationship is better. Yeah, if it works out, it’s better, better than before you had the drama. I think that’s a good belief, and

sometimes it even gets me what I want.

—

Holly called me up the other day and wanted to meet for breakfast, so we met up this morning at a seaside diner in Imperial Beach, CA. I had eggs and she had bacon and pancakes. We talked about dumb stuff. We were just killing time. We're really comfortable together, I think because everything has already happened between us, and now there's nothing left. We each paid for our own meals, and we left. Did we accomplish anything? No.

—

Air pressure is building up in this room. This is one of the hazards of this new air technology that's come out. Everyone brings their own air into the room, but people just let their air come out when they aren't taking a breath. It's not like this raises the pressure in the room too much, but I have really sensitive middle ears.

—

"Clang, clang" goes the retro streetcar, as it makes its way through La Mesa, CA. I'm all by myself, riding the retro streetcar, late at night. La Mesa is getting retro-er and retro-er every year. They've outlawed cell phones and computers, and they're getting away with it. People in La Mesa like it, but they're the kind of people

who would live in La Mesa.

La Mesa's streetcar goes down into El Cajon, CA. El Cajon is seriously considering banning cell phones. But they're concerned about middle-schoolers not being able to call for rides after school.

The streetcar line also goes down to Lemon Grove, CA. People in Lemon Grove are okay with what's going in La Mesa, but they aren't necessarily going to give up cell phones and computers. But they're trying to foster face-to-face community. They're having a block party next Saturday, from 10AM to 5PM.

Here I am, dangling my legs on this branch called El Alamein, which connects to the bigger branch Salamanca, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

Young people gather around me in the parking lot and we play hacky sack for a while. Some of these kids have talent. I tell them stories of my youth. "There's this one lady I dated", I say, "Named Holly. We dated for three months."

The young people are impressed or not, depending on how pure in heart they are. The really pure-hearted young people are pretty impressed. They go on to hear me talk about my time with Holly, about our corporate adventures, about how things were good between us, but we decided to go our separate ways. These young folk will think, “Wow, someday I’ll have a girlfriend like Holly.” And maybe they will. But the jaded young people have already had girlfriends, for like six months.

I bought a 55 gallon barrel and brought it around back of my property. I started going at it with my tools, trying to make my own steel drum. I worked on it for a while, but couldn’t get the sound right, so I went down to National City, CA, and put out an ad on telephone poles. This is the best way I knew for getting in touch with people who can make steel drums. I know it’s a lame way to go, but surely someone in National City will know what to do.

And it turns out someone does. The world is small; it so happens that this guy lives not too far from me. Maybe if I’d played on my own steel drum more, he would have heard me.

Having done this, it occurs to me that my heart’s desire might be accessible simply by putting ads up on telephone poles in various cities in San Diego County, CA.

I've been working on my whistling skills. I want to become a good whistler. It takes practice. I whistle while I walk the streets of National City, CA. No one takes too much notice, although I do get an approving nod from the young man who walks around playing his harmonica.

I'm clumsy. I'm being vulnerable, right now. One time I knocked over an ice sculpture at a wedding and it cracked in several chunks, and started to melt and make things wet before they took care of it. And I wasn't trying. I don't know what I was trying to do, but it wasn't that.

Can you accept me? Can you love me? I've told you a taste of how clumsy I am.

I was playing checkers one time in the park in Coronado, CA. A guy came all the way down from San Marcos, CA (located in what some call "North County", the northern part of San Diego County, CA), and we played checkers. It's okay, he had something to do in Coronado, so I was only responsible for 50% of his gas consumption. I'm good at checkers, but he's better. His name is Sam, and he's intense, focused, and quiet.

Sam used to be a judge, but he switched careers to be a nurse. I asked him about that. He said “It took me a long time to make it to the top in the legal profession. For me, the top was being a judge. When I reached the top, I asked myself ‘Now what? Where do I go from here?’ My wife suggested that I try for one of the higher posts, like circuit judge. But for me, that wasn’t the top of the legal profession. That would have been working in a totally different profession, a totally different reality. So I was at the top. And I thought, ‘I’ve been judging people, now I should start healing people.’ So I went to school and became a nurse, late in life.”

“Was it worth it? I mean, are you happy?”

“It was worth it. Yes. I have 15 years left in my working life.”

—

Resting up after a long afternoon hike, I think about the future. Where will this hike lead me? Over that saddle? That saddle is pretty high. I wonder how I’ll get over it. I bet all the answers are just over that saddle. I can’t wait.

—

Young people keep gathering around me. 15-year-olds. I remember what it was like to be a young person, and that helps me to be a good

friend to them. They don't really have a concept of how old I am. If they were hanging out with a two year old, they'd vividly know how much older than the two year old they were, and to be fair to the two year old, he or she might have some really basic sense that yeah, those teenagers were way different, huge and experienced. But the teenagers and young adults look at me and have no concept of what's coming, all the carvings of their inner rocks, all the breakings and reformings, and the wearings-down and the occasional revivings, the second winds. They see all this looking down in time at the 13-year-olds, but they don't know how it is to have lived through what they have never lived through. They might think that there's a whole file folder full of life events to come between them and me, this person who treats them as a real person. But while they can posit this folder, they have no concept, they can't have any concept, of the things that really go in it.

So they treat me with a kind of naive confidence and unselfaware lack of respect, and it amuses me and warms my old, tired heart.

—

Sparks are formed by the bumper of my van. I don't see these things, but friends of mine tell me. I go to get my van fixed. Oh no, I don't have enough money. What a drag. It's time to get back out there and give music lessons.

A rat follows me around wherever I go. I try not to get too mad at it. I know it's attached to me personally, and I have to be kind of happy that some living being cares about me that much, is on my side. I really wish I could communicate with the rat. Maybe in the future they'll make animal telepathy technology so that people can really communicate with rats.

On the other hand, what we'll *really* do is make a virtual reality where each of us can pull the lever that makes us happy, either that or engineer human brains to no longer desire that — actually, let's just engineer human brains to accept all realities, all pain and pleasure. Let's engineer all human brains to love being engineered. Let's engineer all human brains right now. Engineer my brain while I engineer yours. Let's go down to the beach and play with the sand. Let's float away into the sunset and vaporize into Pure Being. Let's get reconstituted on Earth, fully cognizant and attentive, seeing things as they really are.

A cockroach lives in my van and I think about whether I should kill it or not. If one cockroach lays eggs and there's multiple cockroaches, then we have a problem. But if there's just one, I think that's okay. I have room in my life to let a cockroach live in my van. But reproducing cock-

roaches? I don't know, I think I'll have to kill them if there are too many. There's something here which makes it hard for me.

Fruit hang down from the branch above, but I'm here on the branch Dniester, which connects to the larger branch Salamanca, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

It's time that I sit down in this cafe and do what I've been put on this Earth to do. Yes. I've finally found it. I'm setting things up for a long, fruitful night.

I have my laptop in my laptop bag. But that's just for when things get slow and I need to take a break and use the Internet to take off steam. Those of you who are working on your real life's work know what I mean.

I get up and order some coffee (I LOVE coffee). But the coffee is just to get me in the mood for this task of mine. I come back to my table, which I got by hovering, watching, waiting, and crafty words, and put the finishing touches on the foundation of one of many important processes, which will fulfill me and whatever part of the world I touch.

The cards have been shuffled and I put out each one in a line, eight across. I repeat the process, stacking the cards higher and higher. When I run out of cards, I know that it is time to start playing freecell.

I think I'm getting the hang of what my purpose in life is. I've been spending a lot of time with younger people. I've been "hanging out" with them, you might say. I feel a connection with younger people. I used to be a young person, after all. I play hacky sack with them and listen to them talk, and I tell them wise things that they don't understand, except, sometimes, they do.

Younger people make the world go round.
Younger people are the future.

I'm realizing now what it was that God wanted me to do all along. He wanted me to show up in your life, over and over again, and offer myself, not as a sacrifice, but as a servant, to help you get over your issues. You have a lot of issues. You've got more issues than *National Geographic*... just kidding, *National Geographic* goes back to the 1800s, you're not that messed up. I say "messed up" but you know that that doesn't mean anything bad to me, it just means you're interesting. I'll keep showing up even if you turn

into a boring person. But you won't, even if you listen to God.

I don't know what my purpose in life is. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. But I do know what God wants me to do.

My rat knows the purpose of his life. My rat realizes that all of the insulation he's chewed through has prepared him to cause chaos. My rat is leaving me to join the cause of the nation, part of the terrorist cell that seeks to sabotage the bad guys. Who are the bad guys? I don't know, that's beyond me. Bad guys are like bad news. If my horse (my other friend) dies, then is that bad? Well, maybe I'll need the money I spent on hay to go toward my medical bills. Same thing with bad guys. I don't know. But maybe my rat knows. My purpose is to take care of the animals in my life and help them discover what their purpose in life is.

My purpose in life is to run my company well. It's the thing that only I can do. If my company doesn't exist, a lot of people will be out of a job. How could I tell all those people that the company was going under? So, because I'm the best person for the job, I have to do this job, and it's my purpose. Realizing this makes me realize that each of my employees needs to find their

purpose in life. And their purpose in life might mean they need to make changes. Like find new jobs, or get promoted.

My purpose in life is to surf, to experience Pure Being. Here's how I figure this out:

Premise 1: When I find my purpose, I'll no longer wonder what my purpose is.

Premise 2: When I surf, I experience Pure Being.

Premise 3: When I experience Pure Being, I no longer wonder what my purpose in life is.

Conclusion: Given Premises 1, 2, and 3, my purpose in life is to surf. QED.

Holly's purpose in life is to be herself in each of the spheres in which she finds herself. She doesn't have a lot of control over where she ends up, but when she's there, by gum, she has to be herself. That's her challenge.

My brother is still wondering what his purpose in life is. He's founded a lot of companies in his lifetime, and it seems like each one is half-purpose. It gets him half-way to having purpose. It fills his gaze, but his eyes keep looking around. My brother will end up changing a lot of little things.

I sit down to my life's purpose, knowing that the sun will come up no matter what I do. I try to put in a good day's work, because that's the kind of person I am. I'm running a company that teaches young people to surf. I'm trying to find you and somehow appear in your life. I'm looking around at each of the things that exist, and at the same time I walk steadily toward that saddle, and on the other side, there will be a new view.

Having said all that, life goes on. You were quite the person before you died. I didn't want you to die, but then you had to die. I will remember you for a long time.

Frost settles on the ground while I sleep. In my dreams, I think about the frost that's settling on the ground outside. When I wake up, I walk around on the frost on the grass. I look down at the frost, I see how dry it is, how wet. And then I get up and go over the top of the hill, to try to come down the other side where the bus stop is.

And you lie in your urn, and we scatter you over

the San Diego River, up in Santee and even down by Ocean Beach. We keep half of you in the urn. You're gone, but your ashes remain. And we remember you, each of the things you did, the people you were. And then we think about what lies on the other side of death, the eternity of growing and arriving.

I'm doing pullups on my branch, the one which is named Vrai, which comes off of the greater branch Salamanca, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

So when I went up to the top of the hill, late that night, all by myself, taking on all the risk of coyotes or disturbing homeless people, or whatever else happens on this hill late at night, out at the edge of Spring Valley, this mountain, wondering about many things, I knew that I would meet Jackie.

I sat on a rock and she appeared in front of me, and her face was as stony and death-gazing as ever (as it ever was as she was a ghost).

"Look down there at the reservoir." she said.

I gave it a long look.

I asked her how she was doing. “I am well. I am accomplishing what it is that I am to accomplish.”

“What have you been up to?”

“Have you read the comics pages recently?”

I realized that I hadn’t. “No,” I said, “I guess I got busy.”

“That is understandable.” she said. “I’ve been speaking to each of the comics artists for each of the comics featured in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. I come to them late in their nights. The comics artists are too afraid to talk about me with each other, but soon they will realize that something is changing. I have reminded them of their mortality, and of the nature of power, of the illusory power of what compels us, the manufacture of future, the rush to dominate and beguile. And when they understand this, they understand their part in patriarchal structures, and in due time their comics will portray their new understanding. But there will be more outcomes. They are each on a new vector. People will wonder what happened to the comics page, but they won’t know. They’ll think they know but only I will know, only I, and the comics artists, not as a collective, but individually. I will be the secret behind each individual artist, the reality that each of them cannot speak aloud, but which each carries in their heart. I will be the living death in each of them, so that

they see reality, and bring true life to the people they touch.”

“Wow,” I said, “that sounds really cool.”

“Yes.” she said, “I understand why I had to die.”

“Because you’ve been so effective as a ghost?”

“Yes, I’ve been more effective as a dead person than I ever would have been as a living person. I was just a young woman living on the margins of several people’s lives, hoping to get along. I had a softness and a warmth in my heart, but I was so easily blinded by the ordinary lights of life, the sun over Hollywood Blvd., or the lights late at night in downtown LA. I couldn’t even find my answers in San Diego County, CA. I was looking for answers, but now that I am dead, I speak and I tear down and build up, I plant and pluck up.”

“And so here we are, up on top of this mountain...”

“You have been a good friend to me, in life and in death. I think about you sometimes. You are someone who is always searching for the answers. You will make a good ghost someday.”

I felt a chill go through me, like when I hear beautiful music.

She added, “Not everyone can be a good ghost.

Many people rest in the grave.”

“Yeah, it’s true that I search for the answers. I guess that kind of makes me a lost soul.”

“Yes. You are a lost soul, and this is what is needed in a good ghost.”

“How much longer until I die?”

“I don’t know. You’ll know it when it happens.”

And we talked about people we had known, and I learned a little about Jackie’s life in the Greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Statistical Area, back before I met her.

And the night went on long enough, and I told her of my life, and it was I who had to leave her, I walked down the mountain, looking back a few times, but finding she was already and again out of sight.

—

I sit in my van, drinking coffee out of a cup I filled up at a 7-Eleven. I think about how lucky I am, to be living the life that I’m living. No one else will ever live this exact life.

—

I got up from my couch, out on my property out near Alpine, and walked around to try to find

my favorite tree. I found it, and started piling rocks up under the tree. I knew that something had changed in my life, and I wanted to commemorate it.

Holly sends me pictures over the Internet of the flowers that grow in her backyard. I'm glad to see them. I know that flowers were put here to give us a sense of beauty. Yes, at the same time, flowers help themselves survive, propagate themselves. But I look on the flowers, and see the beauty which God is speaking to me, in the midst of the tragedy of all explanations having been locked up in a slavery to the competition to survive. God is a delicate flower which always grows back.

Grass grows all around me, as I sit on the edge of H St. in Chula Vista, CA. I hear the traffic going by, I smell the traffic fumes. The people, the few people, walk by me as I sit here, looking at the grass grow. The grass grows whether I want it to or not. It even will grow right up to the point that it all is trampled or uprooted, replaced or superseded.

I'm going to have to wake up tomorrow and be normal again. I'm going to have to go back to

teaching high school American history. Tomorrow is definitely going to come. I'm going to feel completely different tomorrow.

The children are throwing water balloons at me as I stare away uncomprehendingly on the branch called Yenisei, which connects to the larger branch Salamanca, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

TREBIZOND

You and I sat down on the bench outside that one house in the Granite Hills neighborhood of El Cajon, CA. The sun was shining on us and it was a hot day. Why were we there? I don't know. I used to have a relative who lived in the neighborhood. Maybe I was showing you his house.

Why were we together? What were we trying to say? I've forgotten all the reasons, but there must have been reasons.

Very well. This memory is over.

A crab scuttled across the rocks down near the shore. I tried to catch it with a piece of hotdog on a line. It was something I remembered from when I was a kid. Why was I doing this? I didn't know.

So I guess I'll just get up and walk over to the shore, get off this jetty, and try to catch the bus to Old Town, and then the trolley to Santee, CA, where I live.

One time I was in Lakeside, walking around that

little lake. There was a kid playing with a remote control car. I had no interest in the kid or the car. Why do I remember this?

Restless people gather around me and I want to tell them what I know, what I really believe, but nothing comes out of my mouth. I'm not afraid of them, but I can't talk to people who won't listen. The words die on my lips.

Roosters calling around dawn don't usually wake me up. I almost would never know that there were roosters in this neighborhood, except that I suffer from insomnia sometimes.

I'm glad that people keep roosters in my neighborhood. They have flair, hope, something extra in their lives. People might keep hens because they have to, but roosters are useless, except for feasts.

I trust you a lot, but I don't know why. Where are you going to and where did you come from? It doesn't really matter. You are disappearing, along with me and my trust. And here I am, living in the present, with less and less to say.

I dove off the diving board into the pool of the apartment complex for the first time. I did a “cannonball” and I made a splash. I got out of the water and did it again. But I didn’t do it after that. I got what I came for and I no longer needed to prove a point.

—

I drove from Santee, CA down to Lemon Grove, CA. It was a hot day. There in Lemon Grove, I went to see my brother at a restaurant. He was working there, but then his shift ended, right as I got my food.

He came over to my table.

“Yeah, so I wanted to talk to you about Jennifer.”

He told me about some incident, about some time he made her mad.

I thought about it and settled on a reply.

“She’s good for you. You know her. Things will work out, you just have to open your eyes and see what you already know, and see where she is now.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. Sometimes I doubt myself, though.”

My brother and I sat there until I ate all my food. My brother was talking about the stock market, how his corporation was doing.

“So, how is it working at your own restaurant?” I asked.

“It’s fine. People don’t recognize me because I’m so high up in the organization. So I’m really getting a feel for what it’s like to be a regular worker.”

“Didn’t some other company try this?”

“Yeah, I think so. Do you remember which one?”

“No, not off the top of my head. How are the people here treating you?”

“The customers are about what I expected. But the manager is kind of a jerk. I’m going to have to figure something out there.”

“That’s too bad.”

“Yeah. So how is your company doing?”

“It’s alright. I think the stock price went up 5% over the last quarter. I’m happy with that kind of growth. I know other people might want more performance than that. But I’m okay with it. Sometimes if you grow too fast, things get crazy.”

“I’m glad to hear things are going so well in your life. Yeah, things sure can get crazy. Hey, I’m sorry I don’t have more time to talk right now, but I have to head home and get some work done. We should do this again sometime.”

“When?”

“Good point. We’re both so busy.”

We laughed.

He got up, went to the door.

And my brother walked out of the restaurant, the fifth of its kind in San Diego County, CA.

—

Where are my real friends? I’m talking about, who are the people I really care about? I’m not sure anymore. It’s like everyone’s fading away. There’s a part of me that was awake, awake like eyes glued to a TV, and that part of me is going away. Does my brother mean anything? Does Jackie? Or Holly? Does Pauline? They’re all fading into the landscape, into the beach, the mountain, the streets. They are becoming scenery to me, and what’s left? Life is narrowing and it’s over, but I keep living.

Life without possessions is like a plant without leaves. It’s not exactly death, because all along I wasn’t a plant, instead I was a human being

with a particular posture, standing outside in all kinds of weather.

I picked an olive off the ground. No one eats raw olives. I don't know of anyone who does. Instead we pickle them in brine, or we squeeze out the oil. I throw the olive three feet in front of my feet and then step around it and walk on down the street, with the East San Diego County, CA heat on me. I walk by people's houses whom I assume aren't home — but I don't know that. Some people are old and watch TV all day. Some people take drugs and play video games. I don't know anything, but the street is very quiet, and from the usual human-practical point of view, empty.

Night falls in East San Diego County, CA, and I can feel the heat enjoying the dark, as I stand on the branch named Diss, which connects to the larger branch named Trebizond, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

Who are you? I know you. I think I know you. You have always been in my life. You've seen everything, but I never saw you before. You were as loyal as the ocean, as safe as the sand on

the shore. I walked all over you, and I never thought of you, but I thought through you. And you are here with me, and somehow I've neglected you. But that is okay. You are like the ocean and the sand, wiping away the words I carve into you, and into my own mind.

We sit at the cafe, and I stare out the window, and you get up in my field of vision and then I'm looking you in the eye, and I remember how tired I am, and tears come to my eyes. It's a hot day, we're sitting in a cafe in Santee, CA. I ask you to sit down, say that I have something to tell you, but I know that I have already told you everything there is to tell. You come with me as I get in my car and drive on the 52, not knowing where to go except that I seek to be with you, you who are in the passenger seat of my car, you who will be at my destination.

I drive all the way to the beach, and I go to get some frozen yogurt — only because it is such a hot day. And I walk down the beach and wave to the attractive gals, and you are the sand and the waves and my heart is with you. And the gals wave back and one of them makes small talk, and I am in love with her, and you know, but you are not jealous — you know me better than I do, and you are the rock on the bluff that does not impose itself on me, and I walk past, falling out of love with the gal in the swim suit. I love you but you do not make me love you... how do you do this? You prove yourself to me by not proving yourself, like a letter that I

choose to open, whenever, and reply with what I really believe.

I walk further up the coast and around the rocks and past the pier and the concrete ramp, and I arrive at a place where there are naked people lying in the sand, and I walk around this place I've never been to before, and I keep going and they call to me, but you are calling to me, and I'm seeking to find you, who are always around me. I see you standing beside me and all the naked people one by one go to bathe in the sea, and I keep going up the coast.

And I find myself wading in the water, swimming though it gets my pockets wet, I go out to sea a little ways to get out of the surf, and I think about death, I think about what will happen if I get too tired out here in the water. I will only miss two things, the entire universe, and you, as I slip under the waves, cramped up, gasping for breath by instinct. And then I arrive at another beach, and I lie out to dry, and finally I'm dry (I hope my proof of insurance and registration are still legible — I check and see that the ink was not water-based after all.) And then I walk up to the road, get out 2 dried-out dollars and 25 dried-out cents and catch the 101 bus back to the parking lot, and get in my car, and drive back to Santee, and you are still with me, but now my car is real to me, and slowly my brother, and Jackie, and Holly, and Pauline are becoming real to me, and my corporation, and my responsibilities and pleasures. And I wonder

if I will ever hear from you again.

—

I played a game of miniature golf. I was with the “Fun Adventures” meetup group. We sometimes play whack-a-mole, and that arcade game where you shoot virus-infected zombies, and that game where you gamble with tokens as though you are popping popcorn.

We have a lot of fun doing all these things, but I really prefer miniature golf to everything else. There’s a kind of geometry to it. My brother is pretty good, too, and we almost become competitive.

—

I dug out some dirt in front of my house in Santee, CA, and planted some flowers. It’s getting to be the hot time of the year, so maybe this is not the best time to put in plants. At least I’m not trying to start them from seed. I got these plants from that one store that has it all.

—

I sit in my backyard, looking around at the dirt and rocks, and I think, “Well, at least this isn’t my front yard.”

—

I'm driving over the mountains now, headed back out to the desert. This time I'm trying to talk to the desert, I have a message for it. I have as much a message for it as it had for me. Did it tell me any words? I don't think it did. So I'll speak to it through my presence, just as it spoke to me through its presence, 11 years ago.

I have everything set up, ready for the night. I see that no one is around, so I shout with all my voice, I say anything and everything. The desert hears but does not understand my words, but it does understand my tone of voice. Once I have shouted out my all-too-human thoughts, I know the desert is poised, I am aware of it on its guard, all around me. I'm listening to it, to its reply. I don't think I'll hear anything, but I'm poised and ready.

Am I really in the desert? I don't know. How can I really be in the desert if I choose to be in the desert? I am not dry. Instead I'm like a spring of water, I am a foreigner to the desert. I can see that perhaps I will flourish.

—

I leave the desert, drive back over the mountains, back to Santee, CA. My house is vandalized, has toilet paper thrown all over it, and I figure that it must be neighbors, it had to be kids, no adult would do something like that.

—

The sun sets and I walk around the streets, looking to use up the extra energy I took in today. Where does energy come from? From glucose. And where does the energy in glucose come from? Plants, and they get their energy from the sun. And the sun? From the beginning of the universe. And where does that come from? From God? Or from nowhere? Where does God's energy come from?

Ultimately, no one knows, and neither do I know where my energy comes from.

I see people jumping on the trampoline underneath this branch named Redruth, which connects to the larger branch named Trebizond, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

Corn is growing around me, I lay down in the sun, and the corn shades me. The soil is hot, until I get used to it. The day is hot. Today is the hottest day of my life. They are saying that the high will get up to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Forgive me for not knowing the Celsius equivalent.

I walk around downtown El Cajon, CA, sleepy in the heat. Most people are inside, hoping to wait out the heat wave of the century. Air conditioning is running at its maximum. I hope that this heat isn't caused by global climate change, but if it is, I know that I can handle even more heat than this. I just have to stay hydrated.

Lizards start appearing in the streets. I walk up to La Mesa and the lizards stop at the city limits. How strange. Do the lizards know something that I don't?

I walk through sleepy downtown La Mesa, CA, and see that most people have remained in their houses, just as in El Cajon, CA. I wonder if I am the only person who enjoys this kind of weather. I try to remember if there's a drinking fountain nearby, but then assume there is not and go into a coffeeshop and order an iced tea and buy a bottle of water. I drink the iced tea and the water and then get a cup of coffee (I LOVE coffee), just because I'm in a coffeeshop and the mood strikes me. And then I just sit in the coffee shop. It's just me and the barista. The barista gets done with everything he's doing and then comes over and makes small talk. Our small talk gets smaller and smaller until it disappears. I am not far from leaving my own body.

A common thread running through everything is that things follow. Things are related to what comes before. But somehow these threads are not complete. They must link somewhere to something that is open. Assuming that everything is open seems wrong, but we find openness at the end of every thread of following. This is something which makes me wake up in the coffeshop in La Mesa, CA, wonder what time it is, try the door, realize it's locked, realize that it's after business hours are over, panic, try to use my cellphone, call the police, get them to come by and pick the lock, and then get gruffed-out by them about how I shouldn't fall asleep in coffeshops.

I talk to the police a little bit, as they drive me back to Santee, CA (it's not too much trouble).

"How have things been on the hottest day of the century?"

"We've had a lot of deaths. People aren't ready for this kind of heat."

"That's too bad."

"Yeah. A lot of older people."

"I wonder if any of my neighbors were affected like that."

"Tell you what, when you get home, talk to all your neighbors, ring the doorbell, and if any of

them don't respond, give us a call."

"What's your number?"

"911."

—

My corn is dead. The weather was too much.
My garden is dead. The weather was too much.
I feel like I have a cut on my arm, I feel that
kind of pain.

—

The heat goes away and we have cool clouds
come in from the coast. Somehow this May
Grey or June Gloom is good this year. We are
punished and then restored, in a way that has
nothing to do with our behavior.

—

Red light comes in from the east. There's a fire
to the east, I can see the smoke come up from it.
This heat has dried us out, and a ferocious fire
destroys large parts of Lakeside, CA, and even
parts of Santee, CA. I live too far south, too
much inland, to be affected. Do I respond, or do
I not? I don't respond. My heart does not
reach out. But then I tell myself that, what is
life without discipline? And I open up my home
to people whose houses were destroyed. Be
quiet, they're asleep right now, in my living

room and spare bedroom.

—

Things have been hectic, and I've had trouble sleeping. One night I wake up 5 times. After the fourth time, I have a dream in which I meet Pauline.

“Hello. How are you?”

“Is this real?”

“You are dreaming, but this is real.”

“Okay. I'm really stressed out. I have all these people staying in my house. And air quality is pretty bad right now. Also, unrelated to the fire, work is really busy.”

“Yes, the challenges of flesh-life are hard. I remember them.”

“How is it, as a pure spirit?”

“It is difficult for me as well.”

“What's wrong?”

“I am hoping to get your advice on something. You are a man and you are alive.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“The young man whom I love — I do not understand him. All I can do is tell him that I love him.”

“He’s really young. He’s a teenager, right? He’s got a lot going on. He’s just developing. That’s a lot for him to process.”

“Yes. I can see that. But what can I do with all of my spirit for him?”

“Well, you can try this. Every day, for 30 minutes, think about him as much as you possibly can. That will help.”

“Interesting. I will have to try that.”

“Thinking about someone when you show up to it and it’s your job is different than when it happens to you when you feel like it.”

And I asked her about Jackie.

“Jackie is doing her work diligently. She is traveling over the world, taking in all the evil and good that there is, and letting go of the good, and turning the evil into proclamations of the truth. Then she appears to people, every so often, to proclaim the truth to them, late at night.”

I thanked her, and then the dream ended. And then I woke up for the fifth time, and figured that I might as well make breakfast. (Be very

quiet, these people are still asleep, I think.)

—

The next week I drove out into the backcountry, to see what kind of damage had occurred. The air wasn't too bad, and so I got out of my car at a few safe but blackened places, saw the trees reaching for the sky.

—

I hear everyone talking, at the party happening below this branch named Guimares, which itself connects to the larger branch named Trebizond, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

—

Aldebaran. Where is that star. I'll find it one of these days. I look up into the sky and try to find anything I recognize, but I can't even find Orion's belt. Is the sky obsolete?

—

I sat in front of my house, in Santee, CA, in a lawn chair, watching people go by. Ever since the heat wave and the fire, people have been walking around the neighborhood more. Some people died from the heat, and one of the houses is being bought by someone from northern Santee, where the fire was bad.

It's July now, so we have a block party, the first for this street, for the 4th of July. People grill meat, and I refrain from eating it, because I'm a vegetarian. I bought a grill just to fit in, and now I'm grilling vegetables. People are interested in my vegetables, which I think is good. It's too bad I've determined not to eat meat; otherwise I would eat from their grills in return.

It's a hot day, and the neighbors are using up their water rations, watering the kids. I guess this way they'll grow.

It's a nice time. Holly came over and is out talking to the neighbors. During our 91 day relationship, years ago, she was always the more communicative one.

My brother couldn't make it. He had an event to go to, himself, somewhere else. That's okay. Sometime when we can both clear our schedules, we'll have lunch.

—

I'm tracking a package which is currently in Vernon, CA, on its way to my house. It's a new blender, which I need because my old one broke. I like smoothies.

I used to make smoothies in college. I hung out with some serious David Bowie fans. You have no idea. We read somewhere that when David

Bowie was making *Station to Station*, he lived off of nothing but milk, red peppers, and cocaine. We couldn't find any cocaine at the grocery store, but we did find milk and red peppers, so we came home and made *Station to Station* smoothies, out of the milk and red peppers. That was a long time ago, and I'm never going to do anything like that again.

I went to the Rio Grande on vacation. It goes through New Mexico, down to the border of Texas and Mexico. We were up in New Mexico, looking at the rapids. We saw people going by in boats, but didn't have the money to go on that kind of thing, or the inclination. We just sat and looked at the river (that little river, compared to some of the rivers we'd seen).

On that same trip we went up to southern Colorado and stayed at the Movie Manor. But we were too tired to watch a movie. Then we went up to Denver and walked around downtown. We had a pretty good time.

Then it was time to come back to California, and then San Diego County, and then Imperial Beach, where they dropped me off next to my van, which hadn't gotten towed.

It was pretty chill out there in New Mexico, but I was glad to get back to the old van. I resurrected the old dog and took her for a walk. I used my van's battery to shock her into reanimation. We drove up to Dog Beach and I let her run around with the normal dogs. They weren't sure what to make of her, because she didn't really smell like a dog. But she smelled like herself, and that was what was important.

I had an idea, but I let it go. I think there's a tradeoff in my life, as I lose good ideas and bad ideas. I guess it's okay this way. I hope I can still figure out what I need to figure out.

I don't wonder about people as much when I'm really tired. I just want to get home, and get in bed, so I can lie there for three hours, getting up periodically to see if that helps.

I drove my van up to Oregon one weekend. It was pretty great.

I'm getting really sleepy here in my lifestyle. I know something needs to be different. I wonder

what I need to change?

How dumb this is. Yet, I have to do this. People have died to me in ways that put me way beyond dissatisfaction with my life.

What do you think? I feel like I am far from you. Meet me at the coffeeshop, not the one in Santee, CA I normally go to, but the one in Carlsbad. Will you meet me there?

—

The doorbell rings, and I answer it. It's one of the people who used to live in northern Santee, who stayed with me. She told me that she really appreciated what I did and that her family wanted to take me out to eat at Grossmont Center. So we went there and I had eggplant parmesan, and we had a good time. But I don't think either of the parties (all of them, or me) expected to see the other again.

—

The branch that I'm sitting on almost doesn't have a name, but I look at it carefully and see that it's called Guaymas, and that it connects to the larger branch Trebizond, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

ALAIN

I trust you. I trust you with everything. I trust you with my eyes, and with my mouth. I trust you everywhere, in the last places I go to and the first places I go to. I fall into you, I let go.

I don't know anything. This is all I know, all I know is this, giant undifferentiated non-knowing, which is all of my experience, all of my life. All I do is live, I do not know.

Tumbling out of a hole in a rockface came a small animal, a hard-working rat, who ran down the slope, escaping what was in its tunnels.

Granted, I wouldn't have said any of this last year. Last year I was so busy talking to everyone I met, telling them how much I appreciated them. I was going around telling people that they were good friends. I went around, last year, trying not to make enemies. And I think that was a good thing for me to do back then.

China is a country on the east coast of the Eurasian continent. It is a large country with

different regions, such as the northern part in which Beijing (formerly known in the West as Peking) is located, as well as the southern part, including the famous Hunan Province, as well as its sparsely populated desert and mountain interiors, including the Tibetan Plateau. China is under the rule of a Communist Party which allows a lot of free enterprise.

A simulacrum exists of me, a being who is 5 feet, 3 inches tall, who walks around doing what I do, who exists in my place. Where am I? I'm right here, with you.

A grouch once told me to get out of his way. I listened. Why shouldn't I have?

Resting under a tree, I saw people walking by all day. They were going to the market our school set up out on the quadrangle, also known as "the quad". The market sold necessary things, like pens, ink, papers with bubbles to fill in, posters of jaguars, and Indian food.

I rode a horse for six days straight. I was trying to prove a point. I was sore for even longer

after that, and I've lost my appetite for horse-back-riding entirely. And so it is that I have been selected to be the director of the stables (5 years from now); (but for now) I am cleaning out the stalls, and looking on the horses without any sense of their adventure or their prestige.

True people can say anything true. They can say what they don't know and say that they don't know anything and what they say they don't know will be true. I'm not even going to mention false people, no more than I just did.

I played the board game Risk for 6 hours last night. Risk is a board game in which the world is divided up into territories located on continents. Players put armies on each of their territories, and are apportioned more armies if they have more territories. And if they have the whole continent, well, then they get even more armies.

Drugs were invented to make time pass faster, or to pass slower, but what if there was a drug that helped time pass just as fast as it was supposed to? What if there was a drug which didn't change anything? I think we are overdosing on that drug, with the intimate amounts of it we

take in every gulp of experience.

I crossed a river the other day, and bobbed on the water, up and down. I was swimming, letting the current land me a quarter-mile down the river. I'm not too particular. I don't make things have to be exactly the way I want them.

Crushed under my foot is a small insect. I have no idea what has happened, and I walk on, never to discover what I've done.

A yard from me is a small dog on the edge of the sidewalk, looking up and yapping at me. And I look in its eyes, and through its eyes, and hear its voice saying "Please don't judge me. I'm not having my best lifetime."

Warts formed on my knuckles are a constant concern as I walk along the beach saying hi to the young women wearing bikinis. I don't want them to notice my warts, to think of all the strange things that are in my soul.

Until recently, I caught nothing when I went fishing, but now I've discovered the secret, which I won't share with you since you need to go through everything I have.

I sat up one night, wondering what to do. I was getting tired, and I wanted to do something that would help me to sleep. Sleeping is all about not doing things. So if I do things, it makes me hungry to sleep. But it's weird. Some things I do just make me have to stay up even later.

One time I saw a cow grazing in the meadow. I walked up to the cow, and she recognized me and came up to me. She was hoping for a treat, but I didn't have a treat. I wanted to tell her one of my secrets, one of the secrets I don't tell anyone. I looked around, and saw that it was just us, out in the meadow. I laid my heart bare — no, I won't even tell you what I told her. She looked at me and said "moo", or words to that effect. Then she went back to grazing. I knew she would understand.

Cows understand because they ruminate. Cows and I are in that way on the same wavelength.

Xavier wanted to kick me off the lot. He's the

parking lord of San Diego County. His gang runs a parking racket everywhere. If you have had a hard time getting a parking space in San Diego County, CA, it's probably because of him. \$2 out of every paid parking fee goes to his yacht, parked at the Chula Vista marina. Xavier haunts me, but in a bad way.

I hold onto a short branch helping me to stay on the branch named Guernsey, which connects to the larger branch Alain, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

"Xavier," I wheedled, "Please, I paid you."

"This isn't about money. This is about my reputation. If you keep saying stuff about me, I'm gonna have someone come by and take care of you."

"Look Xavier," I whined "The truth is the truth. You're a parasite on society. You make San Diego County a worse place to live. That's the important thing. Whether I say this or not doesn't change things. If you don't want to be a parasite, ruling people with fear, then you should stop being that way."

"Look, I understand that you want to say stuff

about me, but just don't say it and I'll leave you alone."

"Xavier," I simpered, "You're in denial. You don't realize who you really are or what you're doing to San Diego County. I have to say what I have to say for your own good."

Xavier got out his knife and slashed the tire on my van.

"Good luck dealing with that", he said, with deep concern, and got into his Ferrari and drove away.

—

I think about Xavier sometimes. I think he's actually a nice guy. I think he's a nice guy who just went down a path, and each step along the way got him a little closer to the next step. Like, he didn't used to drive a Ferrari. Years ago, he drove a Toyota. And then he worked his way up to an Audi, then later a Lexus. And each step of the way it wasn't anything big, just a little thing, like to go from Toyota to Audi was just a few more thousand dollars, a few more parking lots scammed, nothing big. But now he drives a Ferrari, and it's not his only one. But really, given all his expenses, a Ferrari isn't a big deal. He has to make payroll, keep his parking enforcers supplied. The parking enforcers have to be paid well. Xavier has to attract good parking enforcers. And sometimes he has to pay

off the other gangs of San Diego County, or hire them outright. Sometimes he has to donate to the “Police Against Gang Violence” charity, which he set up. (What are the police supposed to do? They have to do what’s effective, what stops crime, given their limitations.) Xavier has a lot of expenses, and so, really, what’s a Ferrari? It gets him from Point A to Point B.

Xavier has a family. We all know this. He goes home to spend time with his wife and kids. We don’t know how his relationship with her goes, but we don’t inquire too closely. We only want to know about the romantic relationships of people we love.

I think Xavier is someone like me. I think Xavier is like how society slowly evolves, how someday we’ll use genetic engineering to fit people psychologically to whatever society is economical, and maybe people will mind, but not after we’re done genetically engineering them. (We’ll figure out a way to genetically engineer people while they’re alive. Don’t worry.)

We’re all adrift. Anything is possible.

I’m kind of groggy from having just gotten up from a bit of a nap. I feel the day kind of coming back together, settling on my shoulders, a little bit. I’m going to go out walking in the neighborhood near my house, here in Imperial

Beach.

I look around at the houses and then realize that I'm hungry. So I stop by one of those "breakfasty" cafes in Imperial Beach, CA, and order some scrambled eggs and toast. I make sure to ask for Tapatio sauce, which is my favorite sauce. I shake some sauce on my eggs and dig in. Delicious.

I step outside and head down to the beach. It's a Saturday morning.

And I realize that there's nothing going on in my life. I've gotten to this place somehow, but nothing is happening. Briefly, something happens, but that's just me moving as I move. I'm an accountant now. Things have changed in my life. My friend Xavier and I have a business together. He runs parking lots, you know, the kind you pay. He's got some lots up in the Greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Statistical Area, you know, the urban agglomeration north of San Diego County, CA. He's doing really well, and a rising tide lifts my boat, for one.

Sometimes I like to find a street corner and cast some dice on it, and see what happens. It's a way to make a social situation happen. As an accountant, I'm interested in numbers. I want

to meet other people interested in numbers. I don't take risks, but I need risk takers, people whose accounts I can do. Xavier is a good client, but his business isn't big enough to give me the income I feel like I can achieve. So I look for risk-takers, out there on the streets.

The sky is dark. Yes, I know that San Diego County, CA, particularly the coastal region from Oceanside, CA down to Imperial Beach, has perfect weather, but some people misunderstand perfection. Perfection is when the weather is itself fully, and in San Diego County, the weather brings a storm exactly when it wants to. In other counties, the weather is out of control, coerced, inauthentic. But in San Diego County, the weather does exactly what it intends.

I am not sure I've told Xavier about my friend Hugh. Hugh is a man from England (which is one of the countries in the United Kingdom, which also includes Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, which are all located in the British Isles, just north of the western part of the Eurasian continent.)

Hugh doesn't know much about business, but he's a good friend. He's retired. I think Xavier and he would get along.

It's kind of chilly up on this branch called Laha-
hasa, which connects with the bigger branch
Alain, which connects to the nameless trunk of
the tree with unimaginable roots.

Young people gathered at the base of a hill,
shouting with all their might. They were not
being political, and they were not being silly.
They learned how to finally get to the next level.

I crossed the street and sat down under the
porch of a house. I was down there with the
skunks that were giving birth.

Sometimes, in San Diego County, and it's not
too common, and I don't think this happens too
often, all the skunks give birth at the same time.
Sometimes the rabbits and the possums join in.
We've never been able to figure out how they co-
ordinate their conceptions. Maybe they tune
into the phases of the moon? I don't know. An-
imals are amazing.

Great people do great things, but they have just

as many hours a day to live as anyone else. In reality, they can only type at most 100 or 150 words per minute or something like that. But somehow they know what to do. That's okay. I'm going to sit under this porch and hang out with the skunk family.

The skunk family is a mama skunk and four baby skunks. They're really cute. I know they could give rabies if they bite me, but I'm pretty sure these skunks don't mind me. I doubt they have rabies, anyway. But if they do have rabies, I can always go to the hospital and get shots. It's not like I'm going to die of rabies.

Anyway, it's pretty cool to see these skunks learning about life. I used to have a job, working as a parking lot attendant with Xavier's company, but now I'm back to living under somebody's porch. I just chill here all day, sleeping next to the skunk family, and at night I go looking for uneaten food in dumpsters. See, when I'm at cocktail parties and people ask what I do for a living and I say "I hang out with skunks all day and then at night fish uneaten food out of dumpsters", they say "Okay, that makes sense, that way it doesn't matter if you get sprayed." and I say "Right, exactly." I find it's good, when you talk to people, to give them something they can latch onto, and while most of the people at the cocktail parties I go to don't really understand what it's like to live under a

porch with skunks and go out at night and get food out of dumpsters, when they can speak up, and see the inner logic of my life, how it works out, how things dovetail, this resembles their lives, in which they have similarly had to join together elements based on their congruities, in order to fit everything into their existences.

It's pretty good under this porch. Nobody bothers me. Sometimes the skunks make noise, but this doesn't bother me. During the day, it can get a little hot, but this doesn't bother me. A little heat never killed anyone. A lot of heat did, but never a little.

At night we all wake up, and the mama skunk goes out to look for food with the little skunks. Or sometimes the little skunks stay behind. I don't know. I'm always out the door, out walking the streets.

It's important that I stretch my legs, get out in public, move around. That porch does have one downside, which is that I can't stand up all the way under it.

I've been calling this thing a porch, but it really might be more of a crawlspace. Whatever.

I walk around at night, and I sometimes find

stuff in the dumpsters that I can sell, and I take it back to the “porch” until it’s time for my monthly shower. I’m not going to tell you where I take this shower, because if word gets out it will get really crowded there. Anyway, I go take a nice long shower, and I unseal my container of nice clothes (I have a tuxedo for cocktail parties and some okay street clothes for doing business) and get dressed (in my street clothes) and go out and sell my hauls to pawn shops. I explain my lifestyle to pawn shop people (when I still smell a little like skunk and a lot like trash) and they believe me. I’m a pretty trustworthy guy, if I do say so myself. They don’t ever think that I steal, because I don’t steal. The important thing is that I don’t steal, and then it’s just a matter of them knowing what’s true.

Anyway, once I have the cash from my hauls, I store it in a special, secret place (my bank account), and then I go get dressed in my cocktail party clothes and go to the cocktail party that happens at night. And I explain my lifestyle to wealthy strangers.

And then the next day I go do laundry and drop off my tuxedo at the dry cleaning and I do something normal like watch a movie. And then I seal up my nice clothes in the container and go back to living under a “porch” with skunks and then going out at night to retrieve uneaten food from dumpsters.

—

Eating with friends is pretty good, but it's something that I don't do all the time. A lot of times I just sit there and watch them eat, but not in a way that makes them think I'm hungry. I watch them talking, in between bites, and the ways that they mindlessly and thus honestly eat their food.

Alcohol solves a lot of problems. One time I wrote on a plate with a permanent marker, but then I used rubbing alcohol and got the marker off it. Why was I writing on a plate? I don't know, it was a dumb idea, that's why I wanted to get the marker off the plate.

Yaks are pretty cool. I could hang out with yaks all day. They don't have them at the Zoo, though. I don't think so, I mean, I haven't been there in a while. I mean, I wouldn't think there would be, because while San Diego County isn't always hot, I would think that it usually isn't as cold as what the yaks like. But who knows, maybe there are yaks in the Zoo. Don't they have polar bears? They couldn't put the yaks in the polar bear enclosure, though. The polar bears would eat the yaks.

Free-flying birds: see them up in the air. Are they free, do they feel joy? Or is life a constant struggle for them? My life is pretty good: see how free the birds are! Your life is a constant struggle: look at those birds, struggling away, far above us! What if the reality is that the birds have their own way of life which is unlike ours? What if they exist in a state of pure flow, in which even squawking away from a hawk is not terror, but is simply to do what needs to be done? We will never know these things for certain.

Except for Xavier. Just as I used to work for Xavier, Xavier used to be a bird.

So we went to talk to Xavier, to settle this question of the birds. And he said, "Well, it's hard to express in English. But I can try to tell you in bird language." And he squawked, in a rough way, with a Hispanic American accent, but according to a specific pattern. "That's deep." I said. "That's really good, thanks." you said. We went away not really knowing how to explain it any better than he did.

Grubs came up out of the ground. They figured it was safe, and they were mostly right. But sometimes the mama skunk or the baby skunks would see them and eat them. One time, when

the baby skunks were getting pretty big, I thought, huh, maybe grubs are good. I'd never tried them. So I ate one. I'm not going to tell you if they're any good.

Freon is a chemical which is used in refrigerators but I care about Freon even less than you do, so let's change the topic.

A tire rolled down a hill, all by itself. Things are becoming animate, more and more.

I'm in favor of this development. I want everything to become alive. That way I won't be alone. But I won't have to have people around me.

Maybe it's nanotechnology. Maybe it's God. Maybe it's a hallucination, or virtual reality. It doesn't matter. What's important is that tires have spirits.

Did I talk to someone yesterday? I can't be entirely sure if I did or not. Sometimes I talk to a lot of people. I feel sociable. Other times, I don't want to talk to anyone. I guess it just depends.

It's young as I stand on this branch named Bru-
maire, which itself connects to the larger branch
Alain, which connects to the nameless trunk of
the tree with unimaginable roots.

A drop of water fell from my eye, but it doesn't
mean anything. It only means that there was a
moment where things were beautiful to me. I
don't mind being dead. It's something that
comes naturally to me. Dying is part of life, and
being dead is even more a part of life.

I wonder if I will ever actually die. I can only
imagine that things will be different after I die.
What if I could have the wisdom of my life with
the naivety of my childhood? Then I could be
happy, and good. But as it is, I live well on the
outside, but disconnected on the inside. I think
it's kind of okay, and kind of not. Everything
happens out of my point of view, it happens all
around me. I think my body is here in the mo-
ment in order to do things in other people's
lives. For my part, I am barely living in this
world.

I'm trying to remember the past. There are

some names I can bring up... I think I used to know some ghosts... and I knew some living people... I almost remember what their faces look like... and then... I'll try to think of their faces... Um... What was I thinking about? My mind is curiously empty. Well, I guess I'll just have to think about something different. I stare out the window and see someone riding by on a bicycle.

I went to the post office and mailed a letter. I remember in the good old days, they put mailboxes out in neighborhoods. But they stopped doing that to save money. They had to do that, in part, because of the popularity of email and social media. And this led to fewer people mailing letters. The postal service might dry up. And I won't care when they are gone, although their loss is a bad thing.

Celine is a friend of money from the post office. She complains about her job as a letter carrier, and I nod understandingly. No one should have to work. Life is too short to work. It's also too short to complain, I tell her. A short life takes you where a short life takes you. Those are the rules.

I'm pretty tired. How did I get to be this tired...

well, by working, I guess. I think I got into the long line of work.

I sit down in the reeds, wishing I could put myself in a basket and float my life down the Nile, to be intercepted by a woman in black, and raised with her children. I could be a Muslim or a Coptic Christian: in those lives, I would have problems, and my mindset would be bound to tensions and difficulties, but that would be different than the total relaxation in which I now exist. And maybe that would be a good thing.

In my Egyptian life, I would walk the streets, crowded with people, getting stressed out. I would be outraged, angry. I would live in paradise.

But I know that even that paradise will be watered down into non-being, unconsciousness. Lack of development is a non-renewable resource, and once I realized that, development itself seemed futile, not even temporarily worthwhile.

Alas, I live so far in the future. Why do I do this? I don't know. Why can't I just live in the moment? Alas, just living in the moment is also the problem, this is also unconsciousness. I have to live ahead of myself, but not too far ahead of myself, to be happy. And I don't know how to

do this. It's either the present moment, or the depths of eternity, and the two resemble each other so much in relaxedness, that they are the same, and equally relaxed. And I know that the reversion from relaxedness to awakeness, back and forth, is futile and arbitrary.

Grass grows around my feet. I stand still and let people walk by me. It's hot on this summer day, this day of thunder. Perhaps I will be struck by lightning.

If I'm active, will I ever have moments of reflection? If I am to do my best work, in order to relax the world as it desperately needs relaxing, I must have times of reflection. And in those times of reflection, might I think as I do now, think far in the future?

And if I become active, isn't it all an escape from my life now? It's not that I object to the selfishness of such a move, but that as my heart is mostly concerned with my own longings, it will not track the reality outside myself.

Reason, searching reason, tries to find the optimum. It even seeks to find its own optimum. But when reason seeks its own optimum...

So I can then stop trying to follow formulas, neither to be the best nor the worst. Instead, I will just do what I do. Ah, but this is relaxation...

A water drop falls from the faucet, and disperses, breaks, and holds together, as it hits the bottom of the sink.

It's a balmy night, and the trees are washed in air. I'm tired. Maybe I can find a hammock, connecting two of these trees. A dog runs by, barking. Someone runs after him.

I don't think I can stand for too long on this un-sturdy branch named Ryuku, which itself connects to the larger branch Alain, which itself connects to the nameless branch of the tree with unimaginable roots.

TURLOUGH

Resting by a tree, under the tree, beside the tree, around the tree, all afternoon, listening to children walking by and crying. It's okay for children to cry, but not for too long.

An apple flies off the ground and up on the branch. Why, apple, why?

Young people gather around me while I lie underneath this tree. They offer me pears, hoping that that will wake me up and help me off the ground. But the pear slices assemble and bring their seeds from the trash near where they were sliced, and the pear lifts off the dish on my chest and the pear returns to this tree. This tree is where all fruit could have come from.

I'm surrounded by children, who are trying to save my life. But it's okay that I'm dead. At least, I'm okay with being dead. Actually, I'm not dead.

Rest everywhere, rest in your car, rest on the edge of the slyly written note which tells you something passive-aggressive, and rest when you enter the meeting. When things get slick, rest.

—

My brother and I sit on the dock on the lake of his 4th home, in Alpine. It's a nice day, a little hot, but breezy and clear.

My brother turns to me and says, "Have you ever thought about what would happen if all the money went away?"

"Like, if business ever went bad?" I said.

"Yeah, business has been going pretty good, but nothing good can last forever," my brother said.

"I don't know, I guess I might go back to what I did before I founded my company," I said.

"Which was? I forget," my brother said.

"Oh, you know, odds and ends," I said.

"Yeah, I guess I'd do odds and ends, too," my brother said.

"Maybe we could join together, have an odds and ends business together. I think as your competitor, I've learned a lot about how you do business," I said.

"Yeah, I've done the same thing," my brother said.

“We could be business partners. Hungry, lean, hustling. Flying by the seat of our pants. Getting by a few regulations!” I said.

“Yeah, that would be pretty cool,” my brother said.

“Well, so how are things with Jennifer?”

“Not so good.”

“Oh, is that why I didn’t hear from you for a while?”

“Yeah, I was hiding out, I guess.”

“Yeah, it happens. But you’ll be back together with her. You’ll figure things out.”

“Yeah, I know. But sometimes it doesn’t seem that way.”

—

Terror strikes at night, I get up and go to the bathroom, my heart pounding, the door I slowly open. Inside my bathroom there is a candle burning. Did I light it in my sleep? Am I the ghost who haunts me? Do I haunt myself when I sleep? Am I a haunt when I sleep and yet walk?

I don’t know. It’s maybe the most logical explanation.

Weariness sets in every Monday. Rainy days and Mondays always get me down. I hate Mondays. Every Monday, I wish it were Sunday. My life is going forward seven times slower than it used to, and seven times faster.

Blunt-edged weapons strike my body. These kids are trying to wake me up, but I'm sleep-lying. They mean well, but they don't know exactly what to do with me. That's okay, but I'll be bruised, in the future.

The kids take a break to go home for lunch, but then they come back and look at me, puzzled, making suggestions to each other of what to do with me, but none of them seem any good as soon as they get out of the kids' mouths.

Pizza and ice cream is a pretty good way to go. I invite my brother and Holly and a few other friends to have pizza and ice cream. I made the pizza in my wood oven at the back of my 3rd home, and for the toppings I use green things harvested from the gardens around my second and fourth home.

I made ice cream, my own special unsweetened

ice cream. We put spices on it, savory spices and balsamic vinegar.

See, pizza and ice cream is pretty classy, when you're 46 years old. It's my birthday.

Combine a few ingredients, and the day comes together like the cars which merge as they get onto the freeway: the day is not entirely smooth, there's the feeling of timing and death, but no one dies and everyone gets to their destination on time. The world is working, bubbling, people are doing what they have to do, barking and biting, grabbing and being grabbed, wishing in their hearts they could be who they really are, but we all live under the veil of the drunkenness of words and expectations of competition.

I crash my head down on this branch, which is called Niamey, which itself connects to the greater branch Turlough, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

I didn't spare anyone the details of my leg operation. I told about how it was done out in the field, how I screamed as they cut into my leg to get out the infected bullet-wound. I spread this

little bit of hell not because I like to poison other people's lives, but because I am the freest man on earth, and I want them to be free.

It's wonderful when all the crashing things stop crashing and you can start propping crashed things back up so that they aren't crashed-down anymore. And you hope that after that, all the crashing is done. That way the things you stack up will stay stacked. You could build a house out of the ruins, you could make a comfortable life for yourself. If only you didn't live in a world with storms and wind...

You can find shelter in any number of people's bosoms, and they will betray you, or not.

People love cats, but why? People love dogs, why not? Nobody hates guinea pigs, though some look down on them, and many people just don't seem to think of them. The same goes for rabbits, hamsters, and gerbils.

I bought something on Craigslist the other day, a special brain-canceling headphone. You know how with some headphones, you can hear the thoughts like they're in the center of your head? With brain-canceling headphones, you can be

free of that.

I've been here and there and everywhere. When Sunday comes, I'll draw a line through this week I'm right now living, from its Sunday through the Saturday which right now is to come. I will destroy this week, and there will be nothing left. Pigs will fly, and corn will come out of the ground wherever their feet touch down as they dance. I will get out on my 10-speed and ride down the block, and Imperial Beach and Chula Vista and Bonita and Spring Valley and Rancho San Diego and El Cajon and Alpine and Pine Valley and Boulevard will go by in a blur. And I'll exit San Diego County, CA, and the desert will slip past me, and I'll end up in Texas and Louisiana and I'll go so fast I can ride my bike on the Atlantic Ocean, and pretty soon I'll be riding in the clouds, and it will turn out that there's no space up here, that's all a NASA lie, up here there is only ...

I wrestled with an alligator the other day. I was at the zoo, and the alligator didn't know what was going on, but it wasn't happy. Animals don't get what's going on, and they tend not to have a good time.

Grass and poppies are what this field grows.
These poppies won't make anyone high, and the
smell of this grass won't make anyone pass into a
dream. This is my field, I keep it in order to not
lose it. Please take care of it, it is the only thing
precious to me. Can we all agree on something?

I'm alive inside this bear suit, although it is very
hot inside this bear suit. I'm saying hello to
children at Rollercoaster Park. It's a very hot
day, but I'm a tough person. When I was grow-
ing up, I'd take my mom's car keys and go out
to the car parked on the street in the sun, and
sit in it, and feel myself sweat, and feel the heat,
and open the door a little bit to let the cooler
day air go by me and cool me off.

Here I am, back at Rollercoaster Park, after all
these years, on the inside, *way* on the inside. I
take the head off my bear suit when I'm on
break where no one can see me. I get fifteen
minutes. I look at the trees around me and cry
out, my amazing bear roar. I feel little sprouts
of hair on my face. It's only when I'm on break
that I can let my true bear nature transform me.

Grass grows on the edge of Rollercoaster Park,
little clumps of weedy grass that was not invited.

I sit by the grass, picking each and every little seed off the stalks, I stare and I hear a quiet, dead voice behind me.

“I see you.”

I turned and looked and I could only see the shimmer of the heat, but I knew it was Jackie.

“Jackie, you found me.”

“Yes. How did you end up back at Rollercoaster Park?”

“My van broke down, my business failed, everyone left me, everything collapsed, global warming set in, robots bulldozed my canyon.”

“I see. Here you are at Rollercoaster Park. What are you getting out of this experience?”

“I don’t know, but this is where my life has led me. I’m here wearing a bear suit and then getting off work at 4PM.”

“It’s hot this time of day. Why are you here? What are you getting out of life?”

“I don’t know. I just kept living and I’ve ended up here. I don’t know where I’m going or where I’ve come from. I’m just a guy in a bear suit.”

“Do you want to know the meaning of life?”

“Yes, what is it?”

“No, you do not want to know the meaning of life.

You already know the meaning of life.

I can't tell you the meaning of life.”

She let out a dry, quiet, earth-destroying scream and Rollercoaster Park was plunged into a grey neitherness.

I could see her, with her terribly dry eyes, I could smell her perfume, and see her heart glowing a different shade of grey. She came toward me and wrapped her arms around my head, and I turned to dust, and the bits of me descended to the ground and dispersed.

They scattered me in the Los Angeles River.

—

I haunt the earth, alone. Where is my love? Where is the truth? What was the point of what Jackie did to me? I have no face nor form.

—

I drift with the snow, and blow in the breeze. I see the whole world, I see all points of view, each of my dust particles is in a different place, some in the heads of different people, some in different

people's hearts. Each of my particles knows where to go, but it doesn't know where it is or who it is. It can write without knowing what it is I'm saying, and so this is how you know what I'm saying.

I have no desires now, except the desire for each of my particles to go where it needs to go. I am scattered everywhere, but I will someday gather, and then I will be able to speak.

What will I speak? Now that I am where I am, what will be the meaning of life? I think the meaning of my life will be just as meaningless.

One of my particles settled under a table in a diner in a small town, where it got swept up.

A particle of mine settles onto a branch called C'est Vrai, and the wind happens to not blow it off onto the larger branch to which it is connected, named Turlough, which itself is connected to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

Roots, rats, butterflies, I am each of them. As a root, I look for magnesium, calcium and I cry when I find a little pocket of phosphorus. It's very emotional being a root. I have no emotions, but I have the root's emotions.

As a rat, I walk to and fro on the earth, exploring, gaining knowledge, leaving my droppings without a care in the world, always moving, always getting ahead, all business, very little pleasure, but a steady pleasure, except when I'm terrified.

As a butterfly, I am where I am and not where I'm not.

A pheasant came over the hill and ran down to the child who was sitting by my body, keeping watch. The child got distracted from me and left the shade under the tree and followed the pheasant, which ran around in circles and then ran off into the bushes, and the child returned to where I was lying, and continued to keep watch.

We can only know the things for which we have personal experience. At least, we can only understand other people when we've had experiences like theirs. No one knows the truth, except for the one person whose experience con-

tains all other experiences. I don't know the truth.

The children gather around my body as I sleep-lie, and they perform a funeral for me, although they can see me still breathing. It's okay, it's good for children to practice these kinds of things before they really need them.

I haven't forgotten too much, I seem to remember my past life fairly well. I wonder what Holly's up to. She took over my corporation when the van broke down. I think it might be a bit of an adjustment for her, after so many years being spent as an insurance saleswoman. She was just treading water as an insurance saleswoman, but as a CEO she'll have to really swim.

Sometimes I cry for the world. I don't see the whole world, but I see so much more of it than I did when I had a body. I have so much less truth, but I cry for how everything is so different, all the distinct beings are distinct from each other. I cry for how I don't know why or why should I cry.

I'm graceful as I wait. I'm quiet as I wait. I'm going through a million thoughts in my head as I wait. I'm stirred up as I wait. I'm insane as I wait.

Old people join the young people around my supine body, lying beneath the tree. The old people look to the heavens and their wrinkles lift off their face, and rotten apples and pears are lifted off the ground and return to the tree from whence they came.

The old people are as old as they've ever been but now they looked like their 46-year-old selves, which is the age that I am forever and right now.

They are ready to go into the world and be voices of wisdom. They can slip into middle-aged crowds and provide a deeper wisdom than middle-aged people normally possess. They can teach people the lessons of having been done.

No one knows what happened to these older people, but they are surprised to see a new set of middle-aged people join the Rotary Club, Kiwanis, and Lions.

A sky comes in to replace the old sky. "Whew, I was tired" says the old sky. The new sky sets up shop, clears the leftover light off the corners near

the horizon, tells the stars it's safe to come out,
and settles in for night.

Our nights tend not to be true nights. They're actually days in disguise of nights. They're pretty dark, but they're days. But the new sky, patiently, puts the universe to rest. Our nights are such days that the whole universe has to sleep right in between day and "night" and "night" and day. We are all asleep, dancing in the true night, treating each other right in the night.

The new sky calls out to a comet. "Come, comet, send us your sparks." The comet comes by and sends down some sparks, and everyone is a child, playing calmly with celestial fire.

—

Grunions come up on the beach during the night, every night is the right tide for grunions. We are all children, throwing grunions back into the ocean, and the grunions keep coming back like we're playing a game of catch. And this goes on for 36 weeks straight.

—

No one is ever tired in this night. It is in this night that we really sleep. In this night, people have arrived. When we accept ourselves as we are, we are accepting these people.

No one can really see anything in the dark. That is why in the daytime, we are striving, longing, wishing, not knowing anything, but living in the light of the sense of knowledge. Our light is false, but we keep going with this light, and it is the best we can do, and it is a weregild of the light which will come someday. We must die and defecate and cry and break in this life, all for the sake of the light, of really being able to see. Then we can join true night and true day, sometime, far from now.

I derive all this by being a dispersion of dust. I see all the perspectives, I see how all light is shadow, how every truth is longing to be true. I see how nothing comes together and yet everything longs to be together. We are only able to see who we are. As a dispersion of dust, I see the truth I couldn't see as a man, even at my peak of 46 years of age.

A porcupine gathers the dust from underneath her feet and goes along, living her porcupine life. She has to keep her feet clean of dust — or, she wants to. She has children to raise, and those children need to know to take care of themselves.

One of my particles landed on a grave and I could see in the daytime a family come, those giants, and lay flowers on me, enormous flowers with an aroma like the beat of a giant bass drum. I sat in this tent, quietly protected, and I could feel a ghost far away speak through the ground at my feet. "Thank you," it intoned. "You are keeping track of someone other than yourselves."

Great Britain and Northern Ireland went to a dance (I'm speaking of what these nations really are, islands of light in the sky, stars in the true night.) Guinea-Bissau asked Northern Ireland to dance first, and they made a merry time of it. Great Britain went off with Portugal. The United States and Russia avoided each other, knowing that they would share a dance later, and Ethiopia and Japan kept running into each other, while they were with other partners. Argentina, Brazil, and Chile sat on the sidelines for a long time, but eventually Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait, similarly unpaired, approached and connected. And all this time, the Republic of Ireland was lost in the crowd, thinking of Northern Ireland, wondering if enough time had passed.

I'm stuck to a bit of stickiness, some sap, I guess, on this branch Denair, which connects to

the greater branch Turlough, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

It's a little bit rainy here on the hill. We're gathered up at the top of the hill, watching the funeral of my body. I can see from the perspective of two of my mourners, somehow they had already breathed in my dust, and I got into their brains. I could see my brother and Holly there, and many of my former employees. It was a sad day for the corporation. After all those years, I look and I see that people thought well of me. What a gift — no one knows how sausage is made.

The speaker for the dead told of my life and who I was, and the people knew who I was, finally. You can never know a story until it is done.

I would say it's a wonderful thing to finally be able to see from other people's perspectives, but because I see so many perspectives, I don't know what's really good anymore. I am always falling down a cliff, and as I fall, this ability to perceive is wonderful, but as I lie with all my limbs broken on the bottom, I do not know such a thing.

The people cast earth on my grave. How odd, they're putting dust on my grave, and right now, I'm dust. So be it.

There are a couple of children here, among those who watched over my body under the tree. They're there as detectives, not as mourners.

Okay. Well, now that I'm in the ground, I can really just take a break. My body is no longer mine. I'm a scattered pile of splinters, yes, I see too much to sleep, yes, but I can find my rest where I can find it. I don't want to not have my rest. I need to rest. I'm getting around, I'm loosening up. I never used to like to tread water, in life. I was always investing, always moving. As I drove my van to different parking lots, I was always making contacts with people.

I grappled with an existential question as I rested. Why am I here? What was I put in the afterlife to do? The circumstances of my death led me to believe that I have something to do, strange as it may be. But what is it?

As I feel myself worrying at myself, and worrying myself, I let go and see all my discontinuities. I see the shoe that I'm stuck to as it walks through New York City, NY, and I see myself leaping and playing with the smog particles over

Shanghai, China. I can see myself landing on a slide in a biology lab at UC San Diego, and I can hear the students being as young as they are well-off in life.

I land in someone's coffee and she drinks me down. Her name is Rachel, and she's about to incorporate me into the blood which goes to her retina, and I'll lodge on her lens (I'm a slippery dust who can go through walls) and between jarring blinks see her type her blog about being a mother.

I'm in the hair of a boy in a distant region, who's lost in his imagination.

I'm flying high above the Earth, one of my particles is already stratospheric, and I can see the truth of NASA, the beautiful views of Earth, all lit up at "night" with its city-dwellingness.

—

I settle into a bean-bag chair in my mind (while I see everything and think too much, all of it, all at the same time), and I watch a movie on a flat-screen TV. It's about people living at night, taking care of dying people. And it's about the end of the world. It's not the end of the world, it won't be, but I am already going back to my past to see what I saw. I can remember my life, and now I see so much that is new, and now I've gone back. I'm watching this movie, and here with the bean-bag chair and the flatscreen TV

and the room, there is no time, there is nothing else. I'm thinking about everything, but I'm here where there's nothing but the movie. I get wrapped up in the plot, as I know everything (but because I know so much come to doubt everything), and the movie is my reality.

Pears and apples turn into flowers, and cars go back to their carports. Saturdays and Wednesdays show up to join Sunday and Monday. Red spots show up on backs of people's hands, but they are OK.

Someone in Australia named their dog Dingo, being clever.

Someone in Peru named their cat Pizzaro, being clever.

Someone in the United States named their hamster Benedict Arnold, being clever.

Someone in San Diego County is thinking of me right now.

Grass grows above each of these graves in the cemetery that has a train running through it. The dead watch the living float by, entrolled

and dressed in their comfortable clothes. People get places, even in a world of dead people. I like living people a lot more than I did before I died.

The branch I'm settled on leans out over the backyard of people named Elizondo, hence its name, Elizondo, and it connects to the greater branch Turlough, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

DASHT-E-KAVIR

Arab people moved into the house next door, and I see them walking by my window when I sit still, late in the afternoon, here in my house in Santee, CA. They sometimes seem preoccupied, as though they are trying to get somewhere important. I talked to the husband-father, Ahmad, and he told me about his business. He imports things from the Middle East and sells them to stores in El Cajon, CA. I told him about my business, and he looked on me approvingly. Now we have something in common.

Girls sometimes play hopscotch in the street. I see them go by and they're in their own world. Very nice, I like it when I'm in my own world.

Candy was my favorite thing to eat when I was 7 years old. I got a cavity when I was 8. When I was 9, my mom intervened and started having more vegetables at dinner. At age 10, I still liked candy better than vegetables. At age 11, I distracted someone at the corner store and then stole some candy while they were distracted. When I was 12, I started getting interested in girls, although I was still interested in candy. When I was 13 I was playing a lot of Dungeons

and Dragons, working on my tan (LARPing), and girls kind of took a backseat, and I still ate candy. When I was 14, my RPG buddies moved away and I played more computer games, and sometimes I forgot about candy, and other times I remembered it. I didn't think about girls. When I was 15 I met a wonderful fellow student, we fell in love, and good breath became really, really important to me, and I cut way back on the candy. When I was 16 I learned to drive and I got into doing drugs. When I was 17 I got in trouble a lot. When I was 18 I graduated high school and moved to Oregon.

I was in Coronado, CA the other day, looking for a place to get pie. Why in Coronado? I don't know. I guess I wanted pie when I was in Coronado. Then I realized I didn't have enough money so I got on the bus and rode down to Imperial Beach, where I was resting with friends.

Sometimes I make plans, but then life takes me a different way. And then I try to revive the plans, but in a new key. Sometimes the key change doesn't matter too much, it's like the key change in a show tune which hits hard and yeah makes you push your voice a little higher, but the melody is identical, within the constraints of equal temperament. Other times the transposition is more like a fugue, where the melody is

shifted into a different mode, as it were, and sometimes it's a reinterpretation that only reminds me of the original tune.

I've got a pet duck nowadays. I've named him Yellbert, because he's yellow. I keep him in my van, in a little cage. He imprinted on me when he hatched from an egg I found in the San Diego Riverbed, and so when I walk around the parking lot here in Coronado, he follows me around. I get a lot of little kids come up and want to pet him, but I make space around Yellbert, and only let one kid in at a time, and I watch those kids. I see a lot of families and people on bicycles. I have to watch Yellbert and make sure he doesn't get into trouble.

Someday he'll grow up and not be so yellow, I'm guessing. I don't know much about birds, so I don't know what he'll turn out like. Do mallards look yellow when they're young? I don't know. I wonder if Yellbert will ever feel the call of the wild, take off, join a flock, and fly away.

I went to the 24 hour Mexican restaurant and ordered a bean and cheese burrito. I always fall for it: I think I'm getting a deal with the bean burrito but I add cheese which is a dollar extra. It doesn't matter. Life is short, and I can afford to be deceived.

One time I went to Houston, TX on a business trip. I had all the shrimp I could handle. And I sent back some photographs to the folks back on the Internet, those people who were trapped online and had lost their bodies.

Holly and I were walking by the Salvation Army thrift store in El Cajon, CA, and she said “Wouldn’t it be interesting if we went in there and bought funny clothes and wore them to a party?” And I said, “You know, you’re right, that would be.” So I bought a red and orange shirt and almost-actually-clean pants and she bought a beautiful and strange evening gown. We waited a few weeks until our monthly cocktail party club was meeting over at the American Legion, and we were real head-turners.

Thanksgiving comes my way once a year. Since I’m a vegetarian, I don’t get a turkey. I’m also allergic to mashed potatoes and green bean casserole. I like ice cream, though, so I just eat ice cream all day, feeling grateful.

The Navy bought a section of seaside resort

housing and tore it all down. Expensive, pretty homes, reduced to dust. I looked on with approval, secretly hating the rich. Then the Navy, ten years later, suffered cutbacks as people lost interest in naval warfare in favor of nuclear armament. So they sold the land to some developers, who built luxury resort condominiums.

When I feel bad, I don't have the energy to secretly hate the rich, and when I feel good, I am too magnanimous, but somewhere in the middle, I get my hating in.

I garnished my salad with radishes and parsley. I try to be an interesting person.

I stand, well-balanced, on the branch Rostov-on-Don, which itself connects to the greater branch Dasht-e-Kavir, which connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

I ate greens for dinner, with some rice and beans. I get this stuff from the Vegan Outreach cult. No, no, they're just some normal people. But they have free vegan dinners every Wednesday night down in Imperial Beach, and I like to

take the leftovers home and eat them in my van with Yellbert, the next day. It's good to have company, in the parking lot in Coronado.

Well, it's time I got out and met some new people. Holly has a friend who lives in Encinitas, CA, which is up the coast, in North San Diego County, CA. So I drive my van up there and meet her and Holly down by the beach. Her name is Angela. She's a nice person, and we have a relaxed afternoon, looking at the sea gulls and picking up a few pieces of trash. Then we go back to her house and she puts on a record. I think it's Mantovani? I'm not really sure. We sit and talk about all the different things that have happened in our lives. Angela moved to Encinitas to be with a guy but then he left her. But she managed to own a house herself, on one income, not a big house, but she worked a lot of hours. She values her house, I could tell from the way she decorated it.

On the 5, driving back to where we were from, Holly asked me, "So what do you think? How was Angela?"

And I said "She was real nice."

"So you want to hang out again?"

"Yeah. Nice people work for me."

Eye-grabbingly, a provocatively dressed young woman ear-catchingly to me said words to the effect of “Hey, what’s your name?” I was at a bar with my brother, trying to meet new people. I told her my real first name and she said, “My name is Alessandra.”

“That’s a really wavy name” I said, because it is.

She looked at me funny but kept talking. “So what do you do for a living?”

“I’m a CEO of a company that manufactures widgets.”

She looked at me, not knowing how to take what I said.

“Just kidding, I’m a bum who lives in the parking lot near the beach in Coronado. I live with my pet duck Yellbert.”

“Yellbert? That’s a very nice name for a pet duck.”

At this point she was clearly interested in me and we talked for a long time, like 10 minutes. I told her about the times my brother and I used to ride around in Glamis, CA on our all-terrain vehicles. She was faking interest at that point, but my brother was also bringing out his best ATV anecdotes. Her falling interest and his in-

creasing raconteurly ability maintained a beautiful equilibrium, like a totally tubular wave.

Who am I looking for when I look for new people? Am I looking for a girlfriend (or at my age, a “ladyfriend” or even a wife)? Am I looking to pass the time? Am I bored?

Yes, I think I’m bored. Life is easy, and the hard thing is finding things to do.

We bring weird things with us wherever we go. I have the paw of my dog, which does not rot, which I keep in my pocket sometimes. That was a good dog, she was. The paw reminds me that though she was ripped apart by somebody’s overzealous canine friend, she certainly did exist, and though I buried most of her, lightning never to strike her again, I could keep this paw with me nevertheless.

I took Yellbert to the Zoo. I figured he should get some exposure to animals from all seven of the continents of the planet Earth. I sneaked him in in my unobtrusive overcoat, and kept him close to me as I showed him birds from far away, and mammals and reptiles and even insects, in that cavelike structure which is the deep heart of

the Zoo.

I drove my van up to Oceanside, and walked around the Harbor. Then I drove all the way back to Imperial Beach. Each place was like the coda for the other.

It's not an election year, so I haven't been thinking very much about politics. I guess I just tend to vote for the vibe that works for me. One of the two political parties is not my vibe, and the other one isn't either. So I tend not to vote. But I get more interested around election time. I probably shouldn't vote, because I don't care enough and know enough, and that probably goes for most people. At the same time, there are people who are actually bad, who know enough and care enough but find it easy to write off groups of people. So maybe I should vote, because I'm not one of them.

I put my stuff in the trash can last night, but I think this August heat is getting to it, and getting to me, and when I go outside, it smells terrible, and that shocks me and makes me a little nauseated, which triggers my anxiety, the pit of dread within me, which makes me depressed, and then laidback and then feeling grateful and

here I am, hanging out with Holly and her friend from Encinitas, at a little coffeeshop in the middle of a neighborhood.

I was hungry the other night, and I was tired of Mexican food, so I went to a Chinese fast food place and ordered something with tofu. They gave me meat instead, which I picked off because I'm a vegetarian. I didn't complain or rate them poorly on Yelp. Even restaurants get tired, and I myself have benefited from people not knowing all of my faults.

I lie back on the branch called Stratford-upon-Avon, which connects to the greater branch Dasht-e-Kavir, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

Grandparents bought me a crossbow when I was 15. I was really into crossbow hunting at that point. I was inspired by the Middle Ages (that is, by LARPing). I went out to the mountains and shot some deer, eventually. My uncle came with me and actually killed the deer with a knife. We took the deer back to the butcher, and got some meat. We ate the meat and froze the rest. We actually kind of forgot about the

meat after a long time, and then it was time to clean out the fridge. My mom was pretty sure the meat was good. So we ate it, we had it on tacos. My brother got a little sick, but the rest of us were fine, and he just wrote it off as one of the many little things that are allowed to go wrong in life.

I was dancing at the monthly cocktail party, not with Holly, and not with her friend from Encinitas (what was her name? Shoot.), I was dancing with somebody else, named Clarissa. She was from England. I liked the way she had added false lashes to her eyes. Her face looked bravely fake. I could see the insecurity in her eyes, and also the anger. Then she danced with someone else and I completely forgot about her.

I walked into the old-school candy store in Imperial Beach. It reminded me of the Wisteria Candy Cottage out in Boulevard, CA. I think that place was pink, and it was out where it was hot and dry. Here in the shop, it's temperate and the surroundings are kind of corporate. Alas, America.

I got some horehound, which was the weird candy I could remember from Wisteria Candy Cottage. I tasted this stuff, and I really have no appetite for sugar like I did when I was younger,

but I can finish a medicinal otherworldliness
once a year.

Yellbert and I went to the beach and walked toward Mexico. I knew we would never reach Mexico, but Yellbert did not know that we would not reach Mexico, although at the same time, he had no concept of what Mexico was.

And then I took Yellbert up the coast, past the naval property, we were all alone, me and my pet duck, with August skies and sand to trudge through. And then we ended up at Silver Strand State Beach, passed by the volleyball players and bathing people, and went under the bridge to the bay side of the State Beach, and I took Yellbert down to the calm, left-alone waters of San Diego Bay, and let him paddle around in the water, and dabble for his dinner. And then I picked him up and hid him in my unobtrusive jacket, and got on the 901 South, paid my (secretly, our) fare and rode back to where my van was parked. A van is a useful thing, but not for when you take a walk and the afternoon gets away from you, and you find yourself far from home.

I'm considering going to the fair in Del Mar, CA.

It used to be called the Del Mar Fair, but now it is called the San Diego County Fair. I think there are some musicians who were popular when I was in elementary school, who will be playing for the price of admission.

Or maybe I won't go to the Fair. After all, I'd have to wait until next year, as it's already August and they're using the racetrack for races. A lot can happen in ten months. My life has changed, several times, in ten month timespans.

I got a tattoo when I was young but it's getting kind of faded. It's a fierce sun, staring at a tired moon, on my left bicep.

I think it's time to put something in the front yard. Drought is a concern, here in San Diego County, CA. So this limits what I can do, economically.

Should I plant native plants? That might be nice. They know what to do with local rainfall. Or maybe I could just have a rock lawn. That's simple. I don't think I can really just pour concrete on the yard. I could, but I feel like it would be out of place, on the block. Would I want everyone else to have concrete slab front

lawns? I don't think so. So because I care what people think, and care about the overall impression, I'm not doing a tragedy of the commons move. As I certainly could, and get away with it. Otherwise.

Don't banish shame too soon, overstimulated world.

—

Terrible people fell from the sky and populated my neighborhood when I was in my twenties. Where did these people come from? I was a rough character myself.

—

There were some Chaldeans, refugees originally, who invited me to church. I was expecting something traditional, Orthodox, something like that. But no, they went to one of those East County megachurches, and it was exactly how I remembered it, although I was escorted by my Chaldean friends.

—

There's a gypsum mine out in Plaster City, CA. Holly and her friend from Encinitas (not Angela, wait, was it Angela? Not Alessandra, definitely not Alessandra) took me out there in Holly's sedan. (I had to get a pet sitter for Yellbert, but it was good to know he was in good hands.) It

was ferociously hot. There was a man in work clothes who paused from his labors (fixing the gypsum-mining machinery) and gave us a tour of the place. How did we know this man? Through Holly's friend from Encinitas, CA. It pays off to meet new people.

I went to the San Diego Botanic Garden, centrally located in Encinitas, CA. I brought Yellbert. No one ever knew that I had my duck with me. I showed him all the different plants, which were so close together, entire continents that we had to walk slowly through in order to not think of them as mere front-yards. We did not see Holly there by chance, nor Holly's friend from Encinitas.

I rest on the branch called Cardiff-by-the-Sea, which itself connects to the greater branch Dasht-e-Kavir, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

My duck has grown up, and he was getting to be too much, so I put him in a petting zoo. I come by and visit every weekend, and he quacks a lot and comes over to me. I wonder how many ducks have their mothers still in their lives when

they're adults.

I saw this guy I knew on the street and he was walking with some contemporaneously aged woman. I tried to say hello, but he just ignored me. I laughed and laughed and laughed at that guy, to myself as I walked away from him walking away from me behind me. That guy.

I took the train and went to see a UCLA Bruins game. Didn't know I was UCLA fan? Now you do.

I drove my van up the coast and stopped at every beach. I wanted to see if the ocean still relaxed me, chilled me out. My research was consistent and showed an effect. I think I'll write up my results in the Journal of Life Lessons, which I keep in the glove box of my van.

So I found myself in Oregon, which is the state just north of California, and then in Washington state, which should not be confused with Washington, D. C., which is located on the opposite coast of the United States of America, engulfed in the two US states of Maryland and Virginia.

No, Washington state, which like Washington, D. C. was undoubtedly named after the famous United States general, who was also its first President (the highest office in the land) — George Washington (who was from Virginia), is in many other ways unlike Washington, D. C., although in some ways they are similar: for instance, while Washington state has open land, it does have urbanized areas; Washington, D. C. is a city.

I don't think I'll ever end up in prison. I know that things can change in a person's life, in unaccountable and strange ways, and unpredictably, and unbelievably — but I think that I'm past the age where it is likely I'll really build up a head of steam in a life of crime, to really get my name out there and attract attention. I don't run with the right crowds. I tend to keep to myself, a lot of the time, after all.

I don't drink selfish beer, only generous beer. There's a difference.

Well-cut hair is a luxury. I tend to cut my hair myself, whenever I find a mirror.

I caught a bug in my van and put it in a container. I guess I was missing Yellbert. The bug just kind of ran in circles inside the container and then stopped. So I let it go in the grass at the edge of the parking lot in Coronado, CA.

I went into town and got some supplies at that grocery store on Orange Avenue. I walked past some freckled-and-not-yet-tanned young ladies, who completely ignored me. Then some young gentlemen on bicycles came up behind me but I'd already heard them and stepped to the side on the wide sidewalk, and they said thank you as they passed. Coronado notices me sometimes, and I'm happy to be a transient but long-term resident of the Crown City.

I drove my van to the swap meet in Spring Valley one Saturday morning, and walked around, looked at the merchandise, but nothing really stood out to me, so I got back in my van, and the tank was half full so I could get places, and I thought, "Maybe it's time to settle somewhere else in San Diego County, CA. Coronado has been welcoming, but maybe there's somewhere else with a parking lot, where I could settle." So I drove around, and couldn't make up my mind where to settle. But I thought, maybe Imperial Beach would work. I knew the area, and I could

stay out of trouble, I could pass some years down there, maybe start to become old there.

And thinking of old age makes me think of old age and what I'll do with myself when my joints give out. How will I live? What will I do? I don't know. Eventually I'll be old enough to collect Social Security, and it won't be a lot, but it'll be something. Maybe I should try to think about retirement. Or, my retirement plan could be "I'm going to suffer and die." Which, in a way, is everyone's retirement plan.

If I think about such things too much while driving my van, I actually feel myself driving slower. But I'm 46 years old. I have my whole life ahead of me.

My brother wants to come over to my house and talk about some business concerns that he has, but I'm tired. I know these are good concerns, whole divisions, and I will definitely want to invest in them. But I'm tired tonight, and I want to just dent a couch.

I had a dream where I was a woman. It was a

pretty good dream. I wondered why women complain so much about being a woman. I powdered my face a lot and blushed and laughed at men and then ate delicious food. Then I woke up and I was like... “Oh... wait, it’s not true, being a woman would be hard... that was a dream... I’m not really a woman.”

I stand on the branch Frankfurt-am-Main, looking out to the horizon, and the branch I stand on connects to the greater branch Dasht-e-Kavir, which itself connects to the nameless trunk of the tree with unimaginable roots.

I RESTED ON THE BRANCHES

Left to her own devices, she leaned over the public trash can and vomited.

When he was in jail, he counted to 100 and then counted back down to 0.

They were good friends until one of them explained why she never hung out with them on Saturdays.

The mouse had important things to do but the cat ate it.

Rome groaned under 100,000 cars.

When he was in school, all he could think about was playing Pokémon.

—
They went through their process until they got
mowed and scattered as mulch.

—
Photons did what they were supposed to do and
went through the double-slits like they weren't
supposed to.

—
A tire burst and the car drove itself into a me-
dian, but fortunately nobody was killed.

—
Water filled it and it just lived with the water.

—
He got down on one knee and she said “No, not
yet.”

—
In the middle of the night, while everyone slept,
the sidewalk continued not to crack.

—
A canyon let itself be eroded, never got fed up.

—
Mystery novels slowly were formed by a man
who lived in a city.

—
Restless people got off the train and walked up
the hill where they met some friends.

—
Somebody was selling drugs to someone else.

—
The cafe shut down when they couldn't pay the
electricity bill, but for one week, people went
there in the dark.

—
Rats and dolphins were both at the theme park,
but only the dolphins were on display.

—
A woman got out her lighter and lit her ciga-
rette, took a drag, and thought about some-
thing.

—
Yellowstone is full of heat and water, is ongoing.

A boy sees everything through a kaleidoscope,
and a girl runs past him and he doesn't see her.

There's a teacher in an English class who is
reading a poem and only half the class can really
understand what she's saying because they don't
have enough life experience.

Yellow flowers grow beside the road.

A third-generation farmer buys land from a sec-
ond-generation farmer who had to lose his land.

They carried water 6 hours a day.

A restaurant got shut down for a health code vi-
olation.

Stars shone on the rock where no one lived.

—
South America was spread out and there was a storm in the Caribbean Sea.

—
There was great light and then great darkness, the whole street-canyon fully visible and then fully invisible.

—
A smell of sweat and dust on the bus.

—
The feeling of being jolted by a rutted road.

—
Irresponsibility: freedom and destruction.

—
Construction workers on their breaks, relaxing in the shade.

—
A lost child came up to an adult and the adult asked if she was lost, and she was.

—
A family lives by the beach for one week every summer, and left the door open once.

—
Yeast got into a pot of dough for unleavened bread and ruined it for religious purposes, but no one got angry at the innocent yeast.

—
In a region by the sea, people sell fish and fruit.

—
In the middle of a table of friends, there's a plate of bread which the restaurant seemingly put there for free.

—
A concrete wall failed to fall over when a bomb went off.

—
She wondered where tomorrow's food would come from, but he had faith.

—
There was a minor disagreement, but everyone

got along and had a good time.

—

A turkey and another turkey ran across the road
and didn't get hit.

—

There was a lot of wind and a lot of sun, and
there was a huge cloud just a few thousand feet
to the left.

—

A car played music very loud in the neighbor-
hood, but no one complained.

—

Two children were desperately hungry and weak.

—

Earwigs got smashed by driven people.

—

Brewers made beer that had everything in it.

—

An unsigned singer sang for an audience that did
not contain a talent scout.

—

She picked at her face, and nobody saw her do it.

—

A kid with a hammer smashed a brick to powder.

—

A man relaxed with some expensive scotch after a hard day's work.

—

A whole country was humiliated by trade sanctions.

—

In a mosque, everyone had a similar inner energy.

—

A deer ran across the road, and did not get hit by a car.

—

A tall man ducked underneath the branches of a

tree.

—

An older but not yet old woman said to her daughter-in-law “You can set the casserole over on the counter.”

—

Someone opened the window to the little bus and let in the aggressive air.

—

I rested on the branches of a palm tree in Isle of Palms, SC.

—

Someone rang the doorbell and nobody answered.

—

A man with calloused hands shook the hands of a man with smooth hands.

—

Someone decided to give up eating meat.

—

Someone decided that recycling wasn't worth it,
given that the world had far bigger problems
than running out of aluminum.

Someone lit a lighter at a concert, and someone
stood on the shoulders of somebody else until se-
curity made them get back down.

Somebody held up a sign at a political rally that
subtly mocked the whole proceeding, but nobody
noticed.

Someone analyzed the results of the straw poll
and concluded that the race was too close to call
and that everyone should vote.

An audience clapped and cheered for someone
they knew.

An error caused a computer to change someone's
name.

An untidy person added one more plate to the stack by their bed.

—

A pie in the fridge became too old to safely eat.

—

Teachers watched as middle school students had to do the official school kissing contest.

—

A kid played with some toys and nobody told him not to.

—

A corseted woman sighed and wondered what she was doing.

—

Granite continued to not split in the night.

—

Someone ordered coffee at a cafe and blanked out for a few seconds.

—

Water rushed and plunged in its course, down a

mountain slope.

—

Someone's alveoli filled with air.

—

A woman ground corn to make mush to eat.

—

Late at night, someone threw an egg at a house.

—

She was late to the party, which was fine, because it was going to last all night.

—

A kid's pet rat died from lack of food.

—

A snake went down into the burrow of an animal and got full.

—

A spoon sat in the drawer and didn't get used.

—

A man was proud of earning \$10 a day.

—

A woman was pleased to finish her social media profile.

—

Someone wept as her father died of cancer.

—

Someone fiddled with the knob on the car's cassette player to "tune in" to working volume.

—

Someone played video games.

—

Someone played video games.

—

Someone played their stereo and stared out the window.

—

A car battery died and no one was around to jump it.

—
Someone ached from malaria.

—
Someone sold their house to move into something smaller.

—
In all directions: water.

—
A fly got into the case in the cafe.

—
Young people drove fast down deserted streets.

—
Someone tricked someone else out of their inheritance.

—
A bird landed on the sidewalk and then flew away.

—
A strange levitation and then an imprisonment

in the dark.

—

Air went down someone's trachea.

—

He sold newspapers to people stuck in traffic.

—

They wailed at the funeral.

—

He said "This is the way things will be" and people believed him.

—

She told her daughter to look out when she was out on the street.

—

They were very tired and were asked what they wanted and they couldn't figure out what to order.

—

A snow-covered peak was beautiful in the sunlight.

—
Lightning struck out of the ashcloud.

—
A mariachi band played a cover song in a Mexican restaurant.

—
A preacher in a church told people to have faith in God, and they did.

—
Someone worried that all the problems wouldn't get solved in their lifetime.

—
A festival played festive music and people danced.

—
Someone couldn't make it to the bathroom and threw up all over the floor of the library.

—
A castle was visited by tourists.

—
A coconut tree got cut down.

—
A lake got a little shallower in the sunlight.

—
Someone realized that his hometown wasn't really known for anything and his friend said "Does that matter?"

—
Somebody pulled a carrot out of clay soil and got blood and dirt on their hands.

—
I rested on the fat branch of an elephant tree, near a zipline park in Baja California.

—
Fruit and vegetables lay on a plate and someone decided to have some pineapple.

—
They had something made with gelatin, and tamales made with cheese and tomatillo salsa.

—
The roundabout was full of traffic and honking.

—
She was the queen of her fifteenth birthday.

—
They chanted until they didn't know anything.

—
They used the Internet and wondered if there was a way to deal with alcoholism in their community.

—
Young people didn't know what they were doing with their lives, but no one told them, because no one told them to tell them.

—
She begged for money and people gave her coins.

—
He tried to sell things in the park, but nobody needed what he had to sell.

Someone invested in a refrigerator and from that, started a store.

—

Someone realized that everyone else in the world was wrong and realized how alone they were.

—

An unmarried woman flirted with an unmarried man.

—

A licensed driver got pulled over for erratic driving and it turned out his blood alcohol level was over the legal limit.

—

His back ached all night long.

—

She sat alone with her thoughts because she was blind and disabled.

—

Nobody answered the phone, and nobody left a message.

He packed a sandwich so that when he got hungry, he wouldn't have to buy anything.

A pigeon landed on a park bench, looked at the cars on the street and then flew somewhere else.

They sat watching the silent film, which had a live score.

A pitcher wound up and threw a fastball.

Someone cleaned out the lint trap on their dryer.

A package of macaroni and cheese was enough for dinner, or, it had to be enough.

She wondered if anything was real.

There was a car crash and the police and ambulance came.

—

A woman led a pack animal into town and sold what she had.

—

Someone watched TV.

—

Someone watched TV.

—

Someone listened to the radio as they drove their car.

—

The bus picked up four people, one of whom didn't have enough money, but the driver said it was OK and moved on to the next stop.

—

Water, for miles in every direction except up.

—

Choppy waves and floating kelp.

—

Ice.

—

Loud-cracking ice.

—

A fish's gut.

—

The teacher lectures and the pupils try to pay attention, but it doesn't always work.

—

She wonders if there's a place for her in the world, and her friend says "You might have to adapt."

—

The CEO of a corporation and the president of a country come to an agreement.

—

A cast-iron pan gets washed.

—

A junk yard acquires one more piece of junk, as someone buys a piece of junk, the one cashier attending to one transaction, the other to the other.

A celebrity washes away the stress of the day.

Someone drops a mirror as they're moving in to their new apartment.

A barrel of wine develops a leak because of a mouse.

A scaffold breaks, and the construction workers get injured but do not die.

Someone calms down a child and the child doesn't realize that she has been managed.

A dog smells someone and takes a liking to them.

—
Three crows sit on a telephone pole, spying out
the neighborhood.

—
A woman cooks potato pancakes.

—
There's a page in the telephone book that has
Barnes, Mary right next to Barnes, Marianne.

—
Someone sighed with fatigue at the end of the
day.

—
Someone couldn't pay the electricity bill and had
their electricity cut off.

—
A short person got stuck behind tall people at a
concert.

—
He got beaten for disobeying.

—
She was sexually assaulted.

—
A squirrel ran into its burrow, even though nobody was going to mess with it (it didn't know that, though).

—
They laughed and had a good time.

—
They got through the slump in the middle of the day, and everything got a little easier from then on.

—
They got married in front of most of the people they wanted to be there.

—
I rested on the branch of a Torrey pine, on the west coast of the state of California.

—
There was a pile of dishes drying and then one of them slipped as it settled.

—
A cold front came in and there was a lot of rain.

—
She stands at the cash register and the lighting
is getting to her and there's just a few more
hours before her shift is up.

—
A blonde woman dyes her hair green.

—
A car drives itself on a lot in a technological part
of the world.

—
Someone fishes off the pier.

—
They dance and clown and relax around a fire.

—
They play the drums and sing beautiful music
for someone whom they will miss.

They tap on their phones.

—

They tap on their phones.

—

He calls his dad to tell him when he'll be home.

—

A penguin sits on an egg in the cold.

—

A telephone rings and no one answers and no one leaves a message.

—

Someone gives in to peer pressure and instantly regrets it.

—

A living dog sniffs at the corpse of a dead man.

—

A truck carries a bunch of workers to their fields.

—

A poker game is disrupted by the news.

—

She gives birth and they clean up the baby and
he doesn't know what to do with his daughter.

—

An analyst sits in his chair, working on a spread-
sheet.

—

They build a new coffin, knowing that it will be
needed.

—

A steer eats something growing out on the range
and doesn't question anything.

—

Acres of water, all around.

—

The dog's hindquarters are injured, but he's still
glad to be on a walk, it seems.

—

He needs his fix but he doesn't have any money.

—

They sit in their apartments all day, with nothing to do.

—

They testify to Congress and somebody listens, and somebody doesn't.

—

The bathroom sink needs to be cleaned, but the person who would clean it seems to have better things to do.

—

He buys a package of underwear at the store.

—

She's fairly confident that he will never talk to her again, so she muses aloud to herself.

—

They go to college and talk to people of the opposite sex.

—

There's a blood drive and he gives blood and passes out.

—

The alarm clock goes off but fails to wake her up.

—

She realizes how hard it is to know the truth.

—

They add their names and emails to a list in a notebook.

—

A company car picks them up to take them to their destination.

—

On the beach, there's some trash from another continent.

—

Someone sits next to someone else on a flight, and they both are absorbed in their books.

—

A catalyst starts a reaction in a high school chemistry class.

—

A coroner sends an email to a family.

—

Someone gets their nose pierced.

—

Someone reads about vinegar and soda in the Bible and thinks “like a volcano...”

—

All of the cats lie out in front of the house with all of their kittens.

—

A tornado destroys a house.

—

A farmer looks at the sky.

—

Grey-colored clothes lie in the laundry basket.

—

A car has a lot of torque, it seems.

—

A pastor gets up in front of his congregation and announces that he's retiring.

—

Someone reads the news and tries to figure out which stories to believe.

—

A student figures out the right answers, at least, on the test.

—

A brainless sea creature gets washed up on the shore.

—

Someone looks at their watch and realizes they need to go.

—

Someone looks at the clock on the wall and realizes they need to go.

—

Someone looks at their watch and realizes it's
time to go.

—

A child does something which annoys an adult.

—

They find a lot of bones underneath a parking
lot.

—

A red light tells someone to stop.

—

An underwater diver experiences what the light
reveals to him.

—

They co-sign the lease.

—

She's deaf, but she can read lips a lot of the
time.

—

They scattered corn kernels on the construction

site, as a joke, but then they actually got corn.

—

They got their shoes stuck in alkali mud.

—

They sank down into leather couches that gave off a fragrance of leather.

—

An inspector told them “Looks like your building is up to code.”

—

They talked late into the night about ideas and then went to bed and had to wake up for work.

—

A breathless woman told a policeman what had just happened.

—

She was the CFO of a company and was looking for a date for Friday night.

—

A broken pipe let water in around the base-

boards.

—

A machine did not wonder if it could think.

—

I rest on the spar of a ghost ship, wrecked on the shore of the Arctic Ocean, northwest of Kugluktuk, Nunavut.