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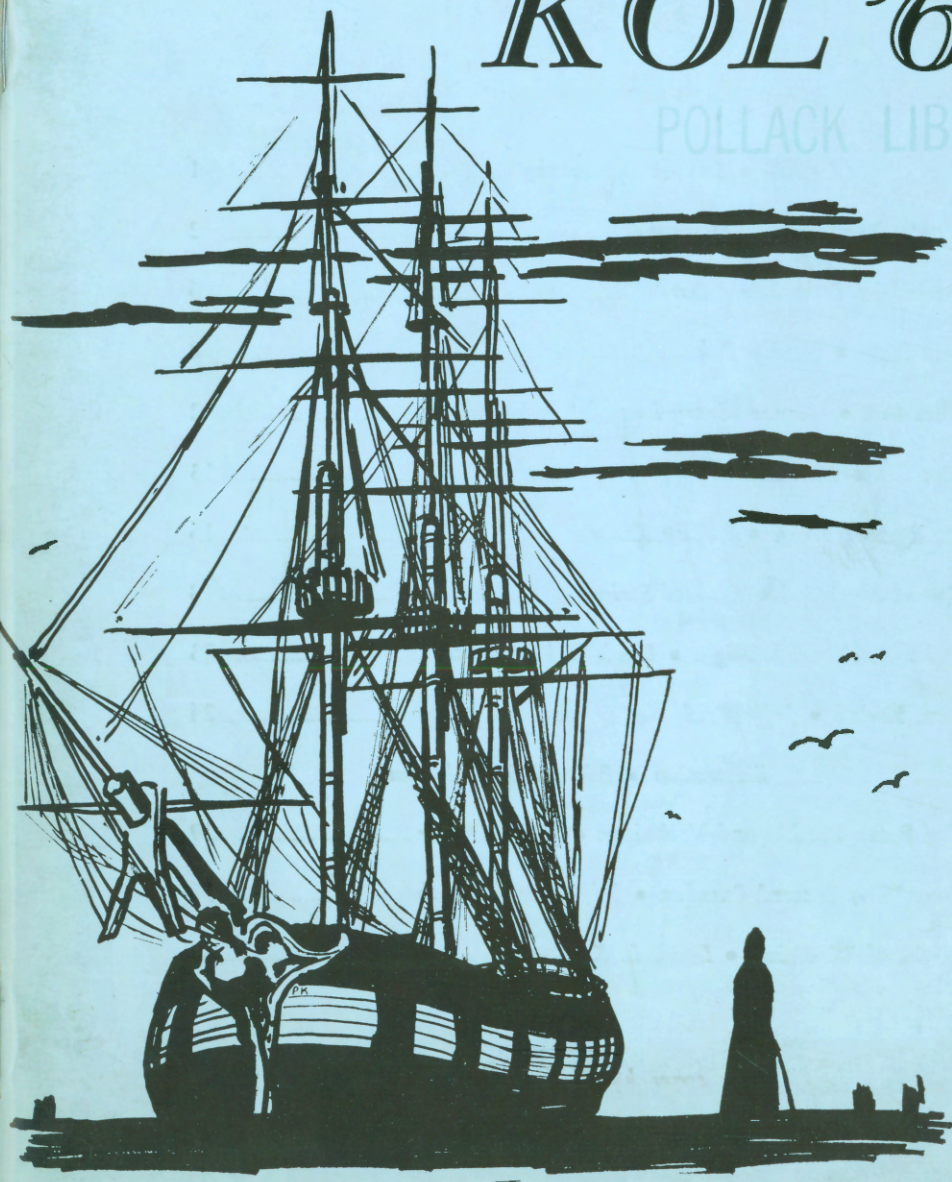


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cover by Phillip Klabr

The Night Is Still

Shalom Rackovsky

1.

The night is still.
And suddenly a wind comes,
Sets the forest
Singing, singing,
Like the harp of
David, that sang psalms
To the Lord in the
Midnight northwind.
The world tonight is
A great bow, humming in
The wind, and its
Arrow has pierced my heart
And I stand, transfixed.

2.

We are alone in the wind,
Alone in a whirl of woods,
And we wander alone,
I and my love,
Losing ourselves by the stars,
Entangling ourselves in thickets
Of moonlight and starshadow
And swirling, settling leaves.
Locked in the chain of stars
And sand and wind
On which the world hangs.

Jyger, Jyger

Manny Mond

I

Day, night, dawn and dusk, and the night is of the hunter.

Yet, let dawn's hunter beware. For then forest folk, in the passion throes of their relief for having survived another night and in the confidence of their day domain, seek to revenge themselves and those at whose hands their brothers and their children suffered.

Such is the owl's plight. Night's silent stalker but dawn's folly, for then is he blind and witless, pestered by his erstwhile prey.

But let the stragglers and strayers beware at dusk. For the night is of the hunter.

But there are other things which hunt in the night, things which mewl and scabble and bay at the moon. Things more subtle and terrifying, things which stir at dusk from the graves domain. Things which roam at midnight under full moons . . .

Things which don't hunt mice and rabbits . . .

Hansel and Gretel wandered deeper into the black forest. Theirs no longer the world which rejected them, leaving them to themselves and things other . . .

Brother and sister squabbles were over now, as gloaming crept catlike upon them, and night winds sifted and purred through the drowsing pines.

And still they ventured deeper . . .

They sensed unnatural stirrings about them, cave things awakening and stretching sleep-sotted limbs, hungry things — things which would be glutted come dawn. Night things.

They sensed things retiring, scurrying, burrowing to sleep in transient peace in cozy hollows and warm holes. Day things retiring before the night.

Hansel and Gretel shivered; they had no cheery burrows, no cozy, fire-lit cabins.

The moon marked them out, seeking them with the great man-

tis-antennae of its rays, coldly surveying the hunched and huddled bundle that lay spent and trembling on the ground.

An owl hooted (a rabbit screamed) and was gone. Things pawed and snuffled, omni-present, no need to secrify themselves, confident.

Stars like fairy fires glimmered distantly in the blackness, and the wind like ghost harps strummed through the trees.

Hansel and Gretel dreamt, unsleeping, to pass the time — of candy cottages, warm hearths, porridge suppers and bed. And especially of those who cared and provided. Dreamworlds. Unreal as the world of the night woods.

And then the black forest did not encroach but lurked frustrated. For it was then that their humanness established for them an unpassable domain, a magic circle. They sensed this and dreamt on, knowing that this was their only staff against the night.

So long as they could dream their dreams, combat unreality with unreality, the forest was powerless. For dream establishes hope, and hope reason, and then things unseen and unthinkable are powerless.

But dreams never suffice; their bones cried for warmth and company on this night which stretched timeless and unending before them. It was cold and lonely.

That fact and the realization of the horror that lurked unbounded beyond their wavering dream circle, dimmed the first of their powers, and its charm retreated before the greedy, slobbering desire of the night.

But they dreamt on — bravely — brave little soldiers. And night things peered longing and unwinking at them, biding their time, patient . . .

II

Little Lord Greystoke lay alone and abandoned on the African turf, his parents dead.

The day was bright, the jungle hot and wet (the sun, alone in the sky, throbbled jungle drums in his head) frantically alive.

The lordling gabbled and cooed to itself while Sheeta the panther, sleek ebony stalker, and the Wangani, great apes, prowlers of the veldt, lurked unseen.

Numa the lion padded up to the lordling on velvet paws and snuffed at him — not hungry — curious. The lordling was not afraid (dogs and cats he knew) though he was shaken by the hugeness and the odor. Stout hearted little fellow.

Numa the lion padded silently away.

Night was falling — a dark and ominous curtain across the sun, killing, the jungle's pulsing and its aliveness.

The lordling was hungry and cold. He needed a bosom (pillow and nourisher) warm and comforting, all-mother.

Comfortable, basking contented, an animated vegetable under the sun, all was right with the lordling's world. But comfort was leaving him, and with it all the trappings of civilization as he knew it. He was left to the elements, a creature of the wild to forage for himself, and he knew not how.

Infants are not sane. They are not creatures of reason, but impulse — huge clutching parasites which would suck their mothers bloodless if their supper depended on it — milk vampires. As such, they are not truly human. And so little lord Greystoke, though alone and abandoned under the night sky, was as much a part of the scene as would be a Venus flytrap.

Humoured with comfort a baby is placable — not, he raves. The lordling raved in an impotent and gurgling panic to the pangs of his want.

And then it was night. Darkness as is its wont, crept in so slowly, undetected, to claim its domain, that the transition was sudden — and of a sudden, strange things stirred the lordings primeval mind, things queer and unnatural which had addled the child-minds of long gone arboreal ancestors, ancestors which had swung apelike through giant, steaming trees eons ago, things which he may have felt alone in his warm bed at night (and which mother love, summoned by his whimpering, stifled and smothered) a passing transience in the night, soon forgotten, but ever lurking.

But now the lordling lay alone and open to the night; the moment didn't pass, the arms didn't comfort, the bosom didn't nourish.

The lordling whimpered.

Left to the whims and desires of the dark, he lay a bundle of sheer terror, insane, clawing at his eyes, mewling and dribbling at the moon.

A bat, huge misshapen moth fluttered frantically on the breeze, brushing him with skeleton fingers, and flitted, a moon thing, into the night.

Eyes awakening with the dusk gazed unblinking at the little man-thing. The Human.

And little lord Greystoke gibbered inanely in the night.

III

The night was a cool secret over the winter woods.

Things snuggled cozily into suspended, neat, packeted little deaths in private burrows.

A white owl swooped and fell, a giant snowflake, into the void. A white hare bared its warmth and its life to the frost and the dead darkness.

Somewhere, far, far away the lonely eternal sea pounded out its endless heartbreak upon the vigil rocks.

Somewhere in the night woods a mute and furry horde made their lost peace with the snow and the stars (they alone awake in the wood, but for the ghostly preying majesties that stalked serenely under the midnight sky.

Mothers nosed yawning big eyed youngsters from restless, anticipatory sleeps.)

Somewhere a weasel made its kill, but the horde didn't care. Moon beam backed they flowed in an endless silver stream toward the sea.

The weak ones fell unheeded and trampled on the cold earth, hard as onyx, by little tramped paws countless as the stars above them.

Somewhere, sunken but there, lay a world their fathers knew long ago, Atlantean and beckoning to their atavistic mind.

They shuffled from the wood, a vast plane that stretched in white immensities under the moon to the sea horizon.

When the first one felt the waves lapping gently and fulfilled over his paws, the last ones had not yet emerged from the woods, so great was the horde.

Countlessly, then, they herded in; slowly, slowly, into the waves and the wonder.

Dov Ben-Asher

from SOME NONSENSE
AND A THING OR TWO

1. My love is like a red, red rose
That is newly sprung in whatever month you will and it was not
asked for and not openly (though who can tell about Freud's
and my subconscious) consciously sought
4. Give to the sieve a barrel of sand
With a large stone in its middle.
Shake it and make it scatter on land,
And the stone, well the stone,
Damn the stone.

from MORE EXPRESSIONS
THAN POEMS

1. If
Birds could tell me what
They feel and experience
Flying
Through endless
Space
Chirr — up . . . nose dive
Lost my stomach
Back
Just a
Wild and wee wow whimpering wind
Flap.p.p it goes against
My wing
A cloud — humph — hhh . . .
It's cool and sticky wet it
Clogs and down
Down see the world it changes shapes
So constantly see us
We live with no
Changing world the sky is always

3. A paved road, not long, just black cement and dust, some grass on
either side, a place to speak one deep word.

You look at the half-sky which is black
And speckled and ask me about the so far
Away that I cannot imagine nor can you.
The word remains with me.

The air turns our head and you meet my
Eyes that hide their hope shamedly.
The earth is a place for man you say
He builds his life if he has strength.
I wanted to answer but the word remains with me.

Cry out in utter unhearing
The word remains with me.

8. Wild
And fighter-like attacks
Of pointed wind-rain
Caught up in whirlwinds of confused pattern
Stay an agitated moment in a visible mist-cloud
And sharp explode in a bursting yes-
Spray on the grey-green side
Of an almost stone hill

THE RIDE

Phillip Bak

The crowds and the shouting were now behind them. So also were the water hoses, police dogs and billies. A '59 Dodge sped out of racially-torn Belleville for the county-seat forty miles away, but its passengers sat rigidly silent as their car negotiated the narrow streets of the desolate Negro quarter. Behind the wheel sat a young Negro in his early twenties whose eyes, below a knit brow, were fixed attentively on the road ahead. As they reached the highway he finally spoke.

"I tell you, Josh," he said to the man sitting next to him, "I don't know if we're doing the right thing. If there's going to be any trouble back there, we shouldn't be an hour and a quarter away." His companion, a tall slim young man of the same age, eyed his friend nervously.

"There probably won't be any more trouble tonight," he answered, "and if we don't get this guy to a hospital soon, he'll die for sure." As he said this, he shifted his position to gaze at the unconscious figure slumped on the back seat. Blood was splattered over the boy's entire shirt and had completely soaked the handkerchief which they had wrapped around his wound.

As he watched the labored breathing, Josh couldn't help remembering the same teen-ager, a half hour before, when he had attempted to break up their rally.

"If Milt and I hadn't grabbed him," he thought to himself, he probably would've died right there."

Then turning towards Milt, he said, "I hope we make it in time." Milt didn't respond and they drove on in silence. Several miles out of town they turned off the main road.

"This way's faster, Milt said. "I used to drive out this way years ago with my father."

"You lived out here?"

"Oh no. We weren't allowed out here. My father worked on the Adam's farm. Of course," he added bitterly, "that was before they fired him for being a troublemaker. After that we didn't have enough money for such luxuries as 1948 Chevies."

"Is that what got you into this business?"

"No. I was too young then. It started recently when I got back from school. I told my Mama — my father died about 5 years ago — that I wasn't gonna be just another teacher. At first, I didn't join any of the local groups, but I gave them all a hand with their work. Then when you people came down last year, I figured that it was my turn to put myself out, so I joined up."

Josh listened intently. All of a sudden Milt laughed out loud. "Hey" he said, "Isn't it funny that here we are — two people working together in this goddam medieval town for six months and it isn't until now — when we're taking this guy to a hospital — that we get to talking about ourselves? Well, let me turn the questions on you. What brought you to this bastion of enlightenment?"

"I guess that it first began when I was at college. A group of us worked in Harlem for a while . . ."

"Well," Milt exclaimed, "that's an education for a nice Jewish boy." He smiled. "Let me guess. Your mother was upset because you weren't going to Medical School and your father couldn't figure out why you wouldn't enter the business."

"My father was killed in Hungary in 1945," he said quietly.

Milt's grin dropped. "I'm sorry. You know us black people; we think we got exclusive rights to the world's problems. I'm sorry. Was it the Germans who killed him?"

"No, he managed to live through the concentration camps. The communists decided not to try his endurance. They just shot him."

Daylight began to recede in favor of approaching evening. The car sped through barren fields punctuated here and there by small shacks whose inhabitants were invariably seated about their front stoops.

"How does he look now?" Milt asked

"I think he'll make it. How much farther do we have to go?"

"Not much farther—Christ, one of their own and the cops refused to come and get him when we called!"

"Well, maybe they thought we were bluffing or maybe they just didn't give a damn and figured they'd rather stay out of the mess."

"What a bunch of bastards they are. If I could ever get my hands on one . . ."

"Well it doesn't pay to delude yourself. And it surely doesn't pay to stoop to the level of their game."

"Sometimes I'm not so sure. A man's got to have some dignity. What do you think all this Black Muslim and Back to Africa business is all about. I'll tell you what it is—it's a search for dignity in the form of violence."

"In the form of violence?"

"That's right. A man can have everything — a house, a car, a vote — everything and he can still feel lower than the bushman in Africa who's got nothing but struts around his village like he owns the world and sends delegates to the U.N. to tell the world all about it."

"The only problem with that, Milt, is how do you separate the violence from yourself once you've achieved your goals? The Nazis also claimed that they wanted freedom from the disgrace of the Treaty of Versailles, but did it end there? No, that isn't our way. It's far too dangerous — not for others but for ourselves."

"Of course, it isn't our way. But didn't you ever wonder if all that we've been doing will really accomplish anything? I don't mean accomplishments like giving the Negro a decent job. I mean will it accomplish anything for him as a man, or will he always feel second-rate in a blond, blue-eyed society?"

"I don't know. That can only come from the man himself. He's got to be capable of it to deserve it."

They drove along the desolate road in silence. The only sounds to be heard were the steady whoosh of air as it blew forcefully into the speeding car and the occasional groans and delirious mutterings from the back seat.

Shortly before they reached the outskirts of the city, Milt noticed in his rear-view mirror that an old Ford sedan seemed to be keeping pace with them. At the next stretch of road he stepped harshly on the accelerator only to notice that the sedan remained close behind.

"Josh, we're being followed," he said.

Swinging around in his seat, Josh looked through the back window and practically stared into the eyes of their pursuers, who were now practically on their rear fender. He thought he could detect a grin on the stubbled face of the car's driver.

"All right," he said, "don't panic. Keep driving normally. They won't dare try anything this close to the city." Just then, the Ford swung out into the left lane of the forsaken road and pulled abreast of their car. The man sitting in the right front seat rolled down his window, stared at Milt for a second or two, then leaning both arms over the window ledge he pointed a revolver at Milt's head. "Pull over, Nigger," he screamed in a shrill voice.

The blood rose in Milt's head and his temples throbbed visibly. Without thinking, he jammed on his brake, quickly stepped on the gas again, and swerved towards the left. The white man howled as his armed hand was mashed between the speeding autos. Careening off to the right, Milt straightened the car out and took off as fast as possible. Several seconds later, their rear window was smashed by a bullet, two others missed their mark, but the fourth ripped into their tire, throwing them off the road.

The Ford screeched to a halt and its occupants piled out. Hastily removing the key from the ignition and opening the glove compartment, Milt removed the gun inside and slipped it into his coat pocket. They both got out of the car and waited. The five men approached, one of them holding his hand in a bloodied handkerchief.

"Hey boy," the driver said as he stepped up, gun in hand, and jabbed Milt in the chest. "What do you think you're doing, pulling a stunt like that?"

"You know damn well why I did it." Milt answered angrily, spitting out the words like venom.

"Watch your tongue, boy. We don't take kindly to drunken uppitty niggers like you."

"Wait a second," Josh said, breaking in, "We've no quarrel with you. We have a wounded man in the back seat who'll die if we don't get him to a hospital. Leave us alone."

"Well isn't that something," the brute yelled over his shoulder as he now faced Josh, "the nigger-lover wants to go to a hospital. Well, maybe we can help him on that score." The others guffawed loudly.

"You won't get away with this," Josh answered, controlling himself. He stepped closer to the bigger man. "Get out of here," he said from between clenched teeth.

For a second, the other regarded him quizzically. Then glancing quickly at the others he grew bolder.

"Come on boys, let's show the folks here some of our stunts."

The others approached. The big fellow menaced Josh with his gun as two others, still dressed in the garb of gas station attendants and with grease smeared on their hands and faces, rushed at Milt. Sidestepping them, he pulled the revolver out of his pocket and fired. One of them dropped to the ground.

The big fellow was startled by the noise. He turned, and seeing what happened, unloaded his gun into Josh's head.

"Come on," he yelled, "let's get out of here." Dragging the body of their friend, the mob piled back into their old car and roared off.

Josh lay on the ground, still, blood oozing slowly from the wound on his forehead and from the corner of his mouth. Milt bent over, lifted him off the ground, walked to the car and gently placed the body on the floor of the back. The other fellow seemed strangely still. He reached for his arm to feel the pulse, then put an ear to his chest. He was dead too.

He reached into the front seat for his overcoat and turned on the lights. Within fifteen minutes he had replaced the destroyed tire with the spare and was ready to go.

He crossed the road and entered an open field. In the distance, a mountain lost its proud individuality as it faded into the background of a rapidly darkening sky. Nearer, the fields seemed to come alive with the sounds of nightlife.

He walked on, the night closing more and more around him. The earth seemed strangely soft beneath his feet. Bending down to grab a handful, he was suddenly confronted by his shadow cast by his rudely intruding headlights. He dropped the dirt and stood up. Tears streamed down his rugged face, but no sob emitted from his lips.

Returning to the car, he glanced once again into the back. Both bodies were rigid, blankly facing upwards. He climbed into the front seat, started the motor and drove off.

THAT FALL

George Henry Lowell

We walked home that autumn crying,
The fallen leaf burning in our eyes
A flame eternal, a flame that seething rises
At these moments, groping thru the crowd
To ask us why the two bouquets
Of small white lillies, kneeling with the widow,
Side by side, are dying . . . asking us why we
Who held the anguish in our palm
Remember nothing of the meaning of the time,
Remember only wafers, drums, and wine;

For when the beggar bares her withered arm
To pin a poppy in our breast, we shudder,
Pulling up our collar to the brow,
River Lethe, as another day reclines
Beyond the shadow of the moon,
Let us retreat beneath thy sands softly
And slowly let the woman bear the tune:

"Red poppies, just a dime,
(Poor Jack, they broke his head,
(And marched around his monument,)
A very pretty thing —
Built him up a monument
(And marched around his head,)
And marched around his head . . ."

The Cat

Max Lebow

Wednesday

Last night I saw this great movie and there is nothing like behaving funny. That sentence doesn't make much sense. Well, neither does anything else (that was the theme of the movie). You don't have to worry about the future . . . Yes you, looking right here at the period you think is coming up but won't because the guy who's writing this story wants you to sit up and think and have a good laugh. (There it is . . . happy?)

Oh, the movie was great. There is nothing like a good funny movie to make you laugh and this one did. It was one of those ones about guys who run away from their finky bosses and get away with it. Of course, they come back to nasty old reality for the important things but that's only at the end of the movie. (Got that?)

Ok, I didn't go to sleep for a while last night — just sort of cruised around, not walking or running or skipping but kind of all mixed up together. Yelling things at stores and making everybody laugh and thinking of funny things to do. Then I sat down and had a long talk with one of the campus cops. (You would be absolutely amazed to know all these guys know about things!) He talked-I-wanted-to-sit-very-still-and-listen-all-night-to-him talk. Very soft and he knew. So, I know, that when the back of my neck gets tight I don't have to hit the bottle any more. I can just set myself down in front of the guard and talk, and let him talk, and it will all go away.

And then I walked the railing on the George Washington bridge. It was a good thing I was almost asleep though, because I can see it from my window now, and it is a long way down there, but I guess I didn't notice that. There was this cat on the bridge too, so after I walked about halfway across the bridge on the railing (the cat followed me) I got back on the sidewalk and danced awhile with the cat and then sat down and petted it for awhile. I don't think that cat had been petted too often. It was kinda skinny, so I took it back to my room, and this morning I made it some powdered milk.

By the way it is today, and I have to live the rest of today before I write more of this story.

Friday

Sorry I missed you yesterday. I was very busy and in fact I was overcut. But that didn't stop me from going to central park all after-

noon, where I wrote four letters and got in the sunday Times magazine section of the times about ten times by getting behind the models who were posing for the fashion pictures there. (I can hardly wait till saturday night to find out how I look.)

On the way back from the park I fell asleep, in the middle of 72nd street because there weren't any cars coming and I was tired. So I lay down and they very nicely woke me before the cop came. I had to run a little to get away, but it was good exercise. I got back in enought time to call the girlfriend (but she wasn't in) and feed the cat. This cat, ladies and gentlemen, is at least the fourteen hundred and fifty second wonder of the world and has managed to go through seven quarts of non-fat, dry milk in the last two days. I have a few relatives who couldn't put away that much even if they were visiting.

Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you what while I was in the park, I threw this little kid in a batman costume into the pond. Then his mother showed up and I went in and got him out and she wouldn't even apologise for bringing up such a brat. He hit me a few times. Before and after. And so I threw him in again. His mother didn't like that very much and offered to call a cop until I offered to get the kid out again so I did. She forgot to call a cop. I think she was too mad.

Where was I? Oh, yes. Back at the dorm I had to explain the cat to the counselor so I told him she (he?) was just visiting. I talked to the guard for a while and he invited me to his house for the night (we're very friendly) but I told him about the cat—that I couldn't leave it alone and all, and he figured I was really crazy until I told him about the kid in central park and we decided I would stay in the dorm that night. I went back to my room and fed the cat again.

I talked to the cat for a long time. I think he (she?) understands me better than anybody. Anyway I didn't get disagreed with. To bed at four and up at eleven may not make you healthy wealthy or wise, but it can be luxurious. Then I called the girl again; she was taking a geology test and the thing at the other end told me that afterwards the girl might not come back but escape to the museum of natural history. I told her I'd like to escape, too.

I took a bus to Bayonne, took a look at Bayonne and took the next bus back. I talked to this guy on the bus and I told him about my girlfriend and about flying a kite on the roof of the dorm and about the two years I spent in the peace corps. I was never in the peace corps, but I also told him about the dance of the virgins in Tasmania and what dean rusk had to say about that when he visited there in 1963. I told him he should join the peace corps and that they teach you to roller skate there if you are going to be in a country

with sidewalks because they want to save money on transportation and rollerskating is an integral part of american life.

He told me he didn't believe the roller skating bit. I told him I didn't believe that his name was whatever-he-told-me. I told him I thought he was robert macnamara in disguise and that he ought to be ashamed of the way he was behaving about viet nam. Between that and the peace corps he looked like I wanted to get off and since I was yelling pretty loud I decided it was time to get off the bus so I explained to the busdriver that my house was right around the corner would he please etc. so he did.

Nobody looked like they wanted to be said hello to so I didn't and sat down at the Nedick's and had an orange juice after I repressed an urge to order two fried grumps. I got back to the dorm and here I am writing again about the world of nothing and nowhere. Now I have to call the girl again so as not to wind up alone this saturday night.

She wasn't in. I guess she has escaped to the museum. The girl on the phone was the same one from before and I said the strangest thing to her. I said, "It's late in the afternoon I guess I'm not going to run away after all. I guess I just won't make it." And she didn't start talking to me after that so we said goodbye and hung up.

It is afternoon and autumn, and it is raining outside.

I just opened the window to let the rain in because the rain is what is real. I suppose the dirt outside that the rain is cleaning out of the air and off of the sidewalks is real, too, because after the rain, the dirt will come back. But how long will it be before I let the cat back out into the dirt to live its own life? And how long will it be before the school I'm in lets me out, too, in the dirt to make my own life?

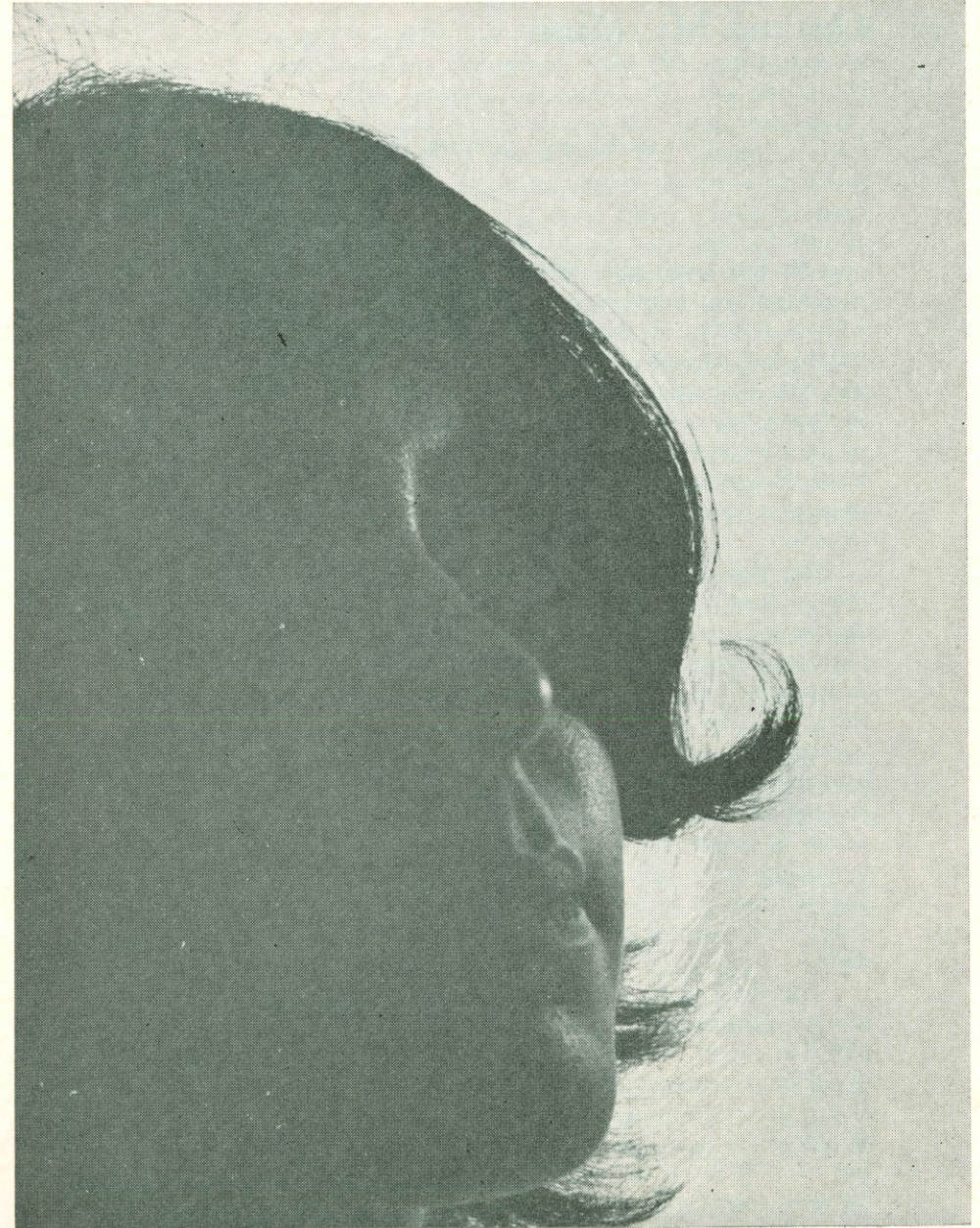
At Evening's Fall...

Phillip Klahr

At evening's fall, or night's soft end, or when
A red sun streaks the dying crimson day,
I seek to hide my grief; but always then
The clumsy flapping wings of time betray

The thoughts that were my joys, and flush them through
The convolutions of my brain; they flutter past
Like writhing clouds, like startled birds, that strew
A darkening purple sky, until its vast

And endless depths reflect my silent tears.
Your face comes too, the face that haunts my nights
Of quiet wandering; those eyes I trace
Against the dawn's green mist; your wind-kissed face
Or flowing hair, that shimmers with soft lights —
And then escapes, and leaves me night's cold leer.



Out of My Mind

In Memory of Mona Scheiman

Richard Steiner

My first brush with mysticism came while riding in a car at the age of perhaps fourteen. How can one describe such an experience without resorting to the cheap expedient of capital letters? It was a sudden flash of new perspective. I looked down from — it seemed to me then — the right hand of G-d and saw myself riding in the car. Perhaps I was only seeing what an observer would see from the side of the road as we passed. But the point is that I was no longer the frame of reference, the fixed points in relation to which all others were in motion, even when sitting in the moving car; no longer inside of myself.

We are all egocentric by nature because of our will to survive. We are born with an instinct to take care of our own needs before anyone else's, and, when we are young, we see other humans — not to mention objects — as a means to fulfilling these needs. Many children in America do not realize that their parents do not exist solely to supply their needs. Yet when such children grow older and learn the techniques of deception, this same egocentric frame of reference may be branded immoral when they try to express it in a "something-for-nothing" relationship, for example, in toying with a girl's heart for money or sexual gratification. Such sinners are tried and convicted of immorality under the "fairness" code of human conduct in our society, but their real sin is their refusal to admit any value unrelated to themselves — a frame of reference which many supposedly moral people share.

Although all sensitive people agree that humans have value or, at least, significance in themselves, few people assign intrinsic significance to objects. We actually come to perceive an object in terms of its use to us, or more precisely, we barely perceive it at all, but subordinate perception to conception. The most telling proof of the tyranny of conception is the man who stands bewildered before a Mondrian and asks, "What is it?" instead of enjoying the visual message that the artist intended to give him. We do have, of course, an instant of real perception before we switch to conception; but as soon as we have found the correct conception, we no longer pay attention to the visual stimuli we perceive.

A little thought will show that the conception of tangible objects corresponds almost entirely to the uses to which they may be put and very little to their actual physical description. We can see this by examining the usage of nouns, which serve as tags to our conceptions. We shall take two examples: the nouns "seat" and "chairs."

A seat is no more or less than something we sit on — no matter what it looks like. "Chair" might seem to present more problems because we use the word only of a seat with a back and legs. But the back of a chair exists in the memory only as a function and not in terms of perception: it is a piece which will support your back whether it be a board or a piece of cloth.

The legs are a problem, for, although there would seem to be no functional difference between one leg bolted to the floor and three free-standing legs, we call the one-legged seats at bars "stools" and not "chairs." The real difference between a "stool" and a "chair," however, lies not in the number of legs but in the presence or absence of a back. Add a back to a bar-stool and it becomes a chair. We tag the object with a noun, depending on how it benefits or harms us.

Even without these examples it should be obvious that, since we are using only a finite number of nouns to label an infinite number of perceptions, some abstraction must be taking place. The question of why the quality abstracted should be utility is answered by remembering that survival is our main concern and that the utility of an object is its major significance in our struggle to survive. Henri Bergson goes as far as to say that all other significances of an object would only serve to distract and confuse us and are, under ordinary conditions of perception, eliminated by the brain and nervous system acting as a mind-valve.

This reduction of perception is the very reason we are not all mystics like William Blake who promised in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything
would appear as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things
thro' the narrow chinks of his cavern.

Here, then, is the goal of Blake's brand of mysticism: to strip an object of all of its relationships to us, of all significance based on utility, leaving only the significance which its existence imparts to it; to perceive an object in its naked Existence.

He would have us coax open the mind-valve, break out of the cavern. What psychological transformation must take place? We must

overcome our fear of not surviving, loosen our grip on our egos, and come out of ourselves.

How can we overcome this instinctive fear — assuming the results are worthwhile? Aldous Huxley did it through the use of mescaline — a drug which, like LSD, produces an ego-less state — and saw Blake's world:

a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which, by some unspeakable and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence.

It would be disappointing to think that such a state could be reached only by artificial means. We might well suspect as "unreal," a state which no man could reach by his own power. And it is probably verifiable historically that many mystics, including Blake, did not use drugs. Indeed, there are other means available.

A Zen concentration exercise is one way. The exercise is done in the lotus-blossom position which makes one less aware of one's body and the world of sensation, apparently by turning the extremities inwards and by keeping them in motionless contact with each other. The world is shut out by closing one's eyes and breathing almost inaudibly in a disciplined manner. It is not at all paradoxical that we must learn to see by closing our eyes, for vision is, after all, not in the eye, but in the mind.

The goal of the exercise is to concentrate on one's breathing for twenty minutes or longer, not thinking about it, for all thought and fancy must be banished, but by being aware of it — possibly of the muscular activity producing it.

When I first began daily practice of this exercise about three months ago, even the discipline of sitting still for twenty minutes produced anxiety. Banishing thought and fancy, however, was much more frightening. With all the world shut out, how can one give up one's last link to "reality" and hope to survive? How can one silence that comforting voice — messenger of the ego? Even when one tries to erase one's mind, there is that desperate voice telling him he is trying. The situation is very much like an insomniac *trying* to sleep.

One day, instead of concentrating, I was lost in the reveries we have just before falling asleep. Then, suddenly my mind snapped back to its original purpose and, too relaxed to resist the process which afterwards seemed so natural and inevitable, I let the voice extinguish itself. Suddenly, I was outside of my body, hovering a few

feet above my head. The stillness was exhilarating. I had not let go of reality. Reality was this ego-less state.

Another likely place to learn to see what Blake and Huxley saw is in painting. Painting, of course, is concerned with vision. The artist — in representational painting — attempts to reproduce on canvas his way of seeing the physical world. While most men usually "see" only utility in the world, the artist may see many other things.

Michelangelo saw man's colossal power — and his tragic weakness. Edvard Munch saw that when a woman screams, all of creation recoils — except man. Rembrandt saw man's soul, a soul of infinite meaning. Many other great artists saw man's soul: Albrecht Durer, Hans Holbein, Jean Baptiste Corot; but Rembrandt towers over them because he saw more of the truth than they or was better able to reproduce his vision. Daumier's visions of man's emptiness are no more than cartoons, but his sympathetic painting of Don Quixote and Don Sancho in the Courtauld Gallery in London is very beautiful. Surrealist paintings may seem disgusting because we do not accept their vision of the horror of life: plastic bread, livid faces, flowers that turn into insects, and drooping behinds.

Thus we call good art, art which corresponds to the truth as we know it, art whose vision we know to be accurate. In Keats' words, Truth is Beauty; that is, when we say "a beautiful (good) painting" we mean a true painting. Dali and Rembrandt could both agree with this criterion for judging art. Only the latter, however, would agree that Beauty is Truth.

If my understanding (and Keats's) of art is correct then a legitimate function of painting is pedagogical. The artist in his painting has imposed his vision of the world on us. There is no freedom to see a painting in different ways as there is in seeing a real scene. Roger Fry's definition of art requires some modifications. As he says, art is "an expression;" but only in a limited way is it "a stimulus of the imaginative life which is separated from actual life by the absence of responsive action." A successful work of art should stimulate in us only the emotion that the artist felt and no other, unless we come to the painting with strong preconceived notions. Only a masochist will be frightened by a Rubens crucifixion; only a sex maniac will be excited by a Renoir nude.

Because the painting compels us to see as the painter saw, we learn to look more carefully and see more deeply than we would ordinarily. But only if there lived a painter who saw with our completely objective, ego-less vision and was great enough to reproduce

this vision can we hope to use painting as a means toward our goal. Rembrandt, for example, was a great painter but he saw the significance in his humanity, not in his existence. In Jan Vermeer van Delft, however, we find such a remarkable painter.

The moment we are confronted with a Vermeer — almost any one of his paintings — we feel the stillness and breathless peace of the Buddhist exercise. We feel as if a veil has suddenly been lifted from our eyes; as if we have just entered a room, somehow managing not to disturb its tranquility. And, in fact, Vermeer sometimes painted a curtain drawn aside as if to admit us to his jewel-like world. The techniques he used — the unifying energy of the single light source and the short squarish brush strokes, the hazy atmosphere, the explicit or implicit presence of all four walls plus ceiling and floor without distortion of perspective — need not concern us here. It is enough to state that of all painters, Vermeer alone can teach us the vision of Existence.

I find the same stillness in the Bible's painting of the binding of Isaac. The absolute sparsity of detail, the bold, sure strokes remind one inevitably of *Haboku-sansui* (Landscape in the Cursive Style) by the Zen monk, Seshu Toyo. I am tempted to think that Abraham, the first man ever to know the one G-d, discovered Him by seeing Existence in nature and by concluding — unlike some other mystics — that this Existence was not G-d but his creation. Perhaps the Rabbis felt the same stillness in the story for they commented in a *midrash* that Abraham saw the mountain on which he was to sacrifice Isaac ("... and he saw the place from afar." Genesis 22:5) but that Ishmael and Eliezer could see only flatland ("... stay here [then] with the donkey." Genesis 22:6).

This then is the peace found by the mystics, not by giving up reality, but by taking a more selfless, objective view of reality, by removing themselves from the world of arrogance to a world full of meaning.

Upon A Ghostless Night

Lewis E. Koplowitz

Upon a ghostless, pure blue night,
I rode a pale white stallion
Across the legends of the night
To pick, for mate, a young fresh scallion.

I found but onions mellowing
And nought else but elder cabbage green
And so I rode a lonely night
Without my smooth white scallion queen

So pulled me up and held my rein
And trotted soft upon the plain —
Then saw — there no exception be —
The fairest queen of wild sweet pea.

I stepped up, on my faithful steed
And leaned far over to look
And (breath!) behold the marvel there,
A Pea-in-the-Pulpit's nook!

— And praying was she night to stars
And pouring o'er her holy book;
Thus, finished was my holy quest
With the peace of that brief glance I took.

And hear! if moral you would take,
That I've no moral bell to ring;
Unless you step, in search of quest,
In to my garden cell as guest

And listen, ah just listen
Water babbling in a brook says nothing, but we listen.

MRS. LEVINE

Jeff Wald



Noon and noon;
So it is noon:
One hour to lunch — time;

Down the elevator,
Because it's noon.,
To where every charm jingles —
Some blunt,
Some dull;
But some brighter than
One hour to lunch time —

But that is seldom.

When it rains.

Because all I have known is the
week seven stories high, multiplied
by two journeys a day in the elevator
at least —

Two at least.

Two, mind you.

Sometimes one might have sufficed for the heartache . . .

The key, where did I put
the key, old
worn out

not at all —

Then why bless myself with
such a name
not moral,
Especially to me — to
myself, I mean . . .

Where did I put it . . . the
key . . . the key . . . ?

Here only old obituary notices
from millinery hawkers, from lunch-
time sellers and from

Some-boy's remembered me who
can she be.

Or He . . . be.

Now I mustn't look, because
I must guess, guess with all my heart.

Who's the letter from . . .

Oh no.

the lunch
lunch'll

GET — BURNT

It would pleasant me much
if I could dormant a meal by
myself:

The whiles while too
long between bath and bath

Because my daughter — G-d
blessed me with one daughter
as He blessed me with one
husband —

As I'm trying to say dear
old one —

No, I'm not going to look
at my-self in the mirror and
say as if I were telling to my
shadow in the mirror —

So hear me, Mrs. Levine, your
daughter has stolen your husband . . .

That's a daughter's privilege
to have her daddy.

And she's clothed him
in dust and pots and pans and crowned
him lord-prince over her Bed's
novel-estate —

Perhaps if such things
wouldn't be, there wouldn't be clothes
and shoes in the refrigerator and
in the wardrobe —

Food.

Yet the letter — the letter.
The letter's from my sister, no.
From my niece, no . . .
You cheated: you looked.
From my dear grandson.
Yes, from my grandson.

Dear gran'mama.

As you know, I have been
working on my first job. For all
the love, affection, and consi-
deration you have kissed me with
during my long childhood, I enclose

\$10 of my first wages

of his first wages.
G-d bless his soul.

To give me a little
bit of his first joys,

To let me sweet with him
the taste of salt that
comes when struggle Atlases
to heave the whole world on his
shoulders

To chime clearly so all can
hear what preaches her fables
at the very first.

But my beloved, you take it
back;

You must bitter the taste all
by yourself.

Because

My child,
My child,

I thought myself young for that
moment and the child cried:

Daddy's
come home
at last!

So I don't need a cane like you:

Take it away, my beloved,
I can walk straight without it.

Take it back, my beloved, and
give me a kiss; bring me flowers
every day:

But
I beg of you.
Don't jingle your pockets to
the grate of the carrion's teeth,

Because all this is
Antiquated by the Most Ancient;

And my heart shudders,
My grandson.

To light a Yahrzeit candle for
you too and light it every day as I
do for your father and your mother,
that one day He'll bless you all with
Life.

So

So go, my grandson,
Close the curtains, so I can
Mourn a dearth of darkness upon these
Four candles;

But you can't let them burn
Seven days a week

Because

I have the Sabbath and you don't,
And I read from it every day:
Silver is not
the Song of the World,
But the smiles that sing from the Eyes,
not
from the
Mouth

The Park: Parable and Variations

Phillip Klahr

On Tuesday, Peter and Janie decided it was a splendid morning for us to go horseback riding.

We had been spending the weekend together, since the boys had no classes for the Purim holiday, and the four of us had enjoyed ourselves — so much so that we somehow couldn't bring ourselves to say goodbye and part. Peter and Janie pointed out that we'd have to break up soon, and, they insisted, riding in the park would be the perfect way to wind up our weekend.

Bobby was disgruntled. "Oh no," he moaned, "You've got to be kidding!"

Janie pounced on him with obvious delight. "Perhaps," she giggled, "we ought to consign you to our old-age division." Then she nodded mischievously towards me. "Or maybe you just want to be left alone with Maureen?"

I smiled back apologetically, masking my irritation. If Janie only knew how little I cared for Bobby! I didn't particularly feel like going to the park. But the choice of being left alone with Bobby suddenly seemed oddly distasteful — and I couldn't resist the idea of spending a little more time close to Peter. I realized how unrealistic I was being. Unrealistic? Foolish, really. How odd that Peter . . .

"Well, Maureen," said Janie, "what do you say?"

I hesitated a moment. "Oh . . . well . . . I'd simply love to spend a day in the park!"

"I don't know about you people," Bobby retorted, "but I still have a hangover from last night. Besides, the forecast says scattered showers."

I moved away from the window, trying to ignore the depressingly bleak sky outside. "All the more reason to go — after all, won't it be . . . well . . . marvellous . . . to ride in the rain?" Peter was grinning, but I continued nonchalantly. "On the other hand, my blue riding skirt is at the cleaners. How can I possibly wear anything else to the park?"

Fortunately, Janie had a beautiful blue skirt she said I could borrow. It really was too good for romping through the woods, but, as she put it, "It needs cleaning anyway."

Bobby accepted defeat rather sulkily, but by the time we left the building he shared our enthusiasm. Since Janie's flat was in the upper West Seventies, we walked to the Eighty-Second Street entrance to the Park.

Soon after entering the park, we passed by the old castle-like building housing the Central Park weather tower. The structure is built on a projection of craggy rock that dominates the adjoining pond and the surrounding field. I felt oddly attracted to the curious old tower. It seemed to huddle, lonely, against the cold March sky. "Jewish," I thought, "Jewish . . . Jewish." Odd, but I couldn't help thinking that it was . . . a Jewish weather tower.

"Oooh, let's climb up there!" exclaimed Janie. The idea was attractive, but the sky had already begun to darken and a stiff wind had risen, so we merely skirted the edge of the pond. We didn't save much time, though, because Janie and I insisted on watching the birds in the pond. Their playful antics delighted her, and set her off giggling. I still felt kind of gloomy, so I began to knock stones around on the damp shore.

Bobby shuffled over to me. "You know that Soc. paper I was telling you about — on population curves in Eastern Europe? I bet you'd never guess I got an A on it!" Then he touched my shoulder. "You feel like skipping pebbles on the pond?" I was somewhat accustomed to the *non-sequitur* pattern in Bobby's thinking; so I merely nodded approval, and, with something less than enthusiasm, watched him send stones skipping far along the surface of the water.

"Let's go!" shouted Peter. "We should at least get there before it rains." Bobby reluctantly dropped his pebbles, and we continued along the shore. Peter and Janie were walking ahead of us, holding hands. I couldn't help staring at Peter's thick, tawny hair. Our feet beat out a deliberate, crunching rhythm on the sand, a muffled grating sound that clashed against the strange hushed silence that precedes a summer shower — the sky shimmering with a dim, delicate glow, the air tinged with a mysterious expectancy. Bobby was saying something, quietly and slowly, in my ear, but I wasn't listening to a word he said. Only Peter, and the crunching, and a lone bird here or there flying over the wind-swept pond.

By the time we reached the riding stables, the wind had dropped and the sky wasn't as dark as it had been. I chose a horse with strong,

supple legs and a kind of proud haughtiness that attracted me. It was a relief to finally mount, to feel the throbbing, pulsing energy of sinewy muscle beneath me. We rode for an hour.

For a while there was a fine drizzle in the air, and I laughed as it sprayed in my face. Then a light shower began, and we sought cover under some trees. While the boys were busy securing the horses, Janie and I wandered to the edge of the wooded area. I felt strangely ill at ease; finally I broke the embarrassing silence between us. "How has that Abnormal Psych. course you told me about turned out?"

Janie stared at me, and for the first time that day there was a blank expression on her gentle face. Her soft green eyes were sparkling in the misty half-light. Then she looked away from me.

"What is it Janie? What is it?"

She smiled weakly, and brushed her long blond hair away from her eyes. "Well, it's Peter. It's just . . . well, he seems so distant. Not that he's said anything . . . but I just can tell. Everything he does seems to be different."

I noticed with discomfort that Janie was perspiring, and she was fidgeting nervously. Then she clutched my hand. "Oh Maureen, without Peter I'd be completely lost. If I . . ." She moved away, pursing her lips. Then she once again looked at me, meekly. "It seems such a silly thing to talk about. But I've got to keep from losing Peter. I've just got to!"

An overwhelming sense of aching, of longing, swept through me. I stared off into the misty horizon, then moved towards Janie. "I wouldn't worry," I said, "It's probably only that experiment Peter's working on." I somehow forced a grin through the lie. "You don't seem to realize how absent-minded you become after being cooped up in a lab all week."

"But its not that at all," Janie answered. "It's more as if he were being deliberately secretive, as if there were something he was trying to hide from me, and that — I just don't know if it means his attitude toward me has changed. I just don't know!"

"Look Janie, how can you be so naive? I know Peter very well." I realized my mistake too late, as Janie looked up in surprise. I continued hastily. "It's just his way of being attractive. Peter can't stand not being the center of attraction, so as soon as he notices the slightest decrease in your affection, he'll become very impassive in order to arouse your interest. I know it sounds silly, but that's the way it is. In fact, you might catch him off guard if you tried using *his* tactics."

Janie laughed weakly. "It's all too complicated for me. But what you say does make sense, and maybe I'm exaggerating the whole thing. Anyway, you've certainly made me feel better about it."

"That's all I wanted to know, Janie, that's all I wanted to know."

* * *

The shower was soon over, and we returned to the stables. By the time we walked back to the pond the sun had broken through the clouds. We spread out a blanket Peter had brought, and rested there for awhile; then Bobby suggested that we buy some franks and beans for lunch.

"Won't you boys mind if the food isn't Kosher?" asked Janie seductively.

"Let's not get into that again!" exclaimed Bobby. "After all, you're no less Jewish than we are. There's a little Italian place not far from here. I'll go pick up the food, and we can eat here. You want to come along, Maureen?"

I answered that the riding had worn me out, and that I was staying where I was even if it meant starving to death.

"Oh, then I'll go!" laughed Janie, with a naughty sparkle in her eye. She went off with Bobby, while Peter toyed with some grass absent-mindedly. I disliked the awkward silence between us, so I tried to start a conversation.

"You know, I'm certainly indebted to you for starting me off on Bach." Peter reclined on his elbow, and smiled wistfully. "I still find an annoying mechanical quality in much of his music," I continued, "but then, so many of this pieces shine with a—well, jewel-like beauty."

Peter's smile widened. "Did you know that your eyes shine with a jewel-like beauty?"

I was caught off guard. I thought it best to ignore him. "I've been thinking about that ethical problem you raised, though — the fact that the German recordings of Bach's cantatas probably include many ex-Nazi performers. You felt it wasn't right to listen to them. What did you find out about that?"

Peter shrugged irreverently, and mumbled something under his breath.

"What's that? You did look into it, didn't you . . .?"

"You know something?" Peter started, "that skirt looks far better on you than it ever did on Janie. That's what she gets for losing weight."

I tried desperately to suppress a blush. "I don't understand you, Peter, I don't understand you at all. You know that Janie's deeply in love with you, don't you?"

Peter laid his hand on my arm. I started to remove my arm, but then decided, with considerable embarrassment, not to. Peter's smile disappeared. "I know that Maureen, I know that. And I think you know how badly I would feel hurting Janie's feelings. But what am I supposed to do? I can't honor something that's dead." He stopped,

and began to frown. "Or perhaps now it's *your* turn to reject *me*?"

"No, no, I didn't mean that." I felt dizzy and confused. Peter sat up, and paused. He looked at me with his deep dark eyes. Somehow, not actually controlling my actions, I passed my trembling hand through his smooth, tawny hair. And I smiled, simply because it felt good to look at his dark blue eyes and his strong, sharp features. I knew that I was acting foolishly, but the confusion that troubled me was nubbed by a feeling of suspension in time, and everything I had known as reality seemed immeasurably remote.

Then Peter abruptly caught my shoulders and, pulling me against himself, began kissing me. I wanted to release his grip, but I yielded helplessly; then I hugged myself fiercely to his body. My soul seemed to melt in the release of all that I had suppressed for the past year. Then I remembered Janie.

I pushed myself out of Peter's arms. He stared at me in disbelief. "Please — no more," I gasped, and turned to hide my tears. But no tears came — only a bitter, burning sensation. I rose and straightened my clothes, noticing with something close to despair the ugly grass stains in my skirt — in Janie's skirt. When I turned around, Peter was still sitting on the ground, looking at me puzzledly.

It wasn't long before Bob and Janie returned. We watched in silence as they set up a makeshift picnic area, replete with franks in pink paper plates, containers of beans, and four bottles of soda. Peter joined them, almost as if nothing had happened. I tried to do the same, but steaming food only heightened the anxious disillusionment that was pounding through my brain.

"Maureen, why aren't you eating?" Janie's voice had a strident, whining tone.

"Yes, it's really delicious," added Peter. "You wouldn't want us to throw away good food, would you?"

I turned to leave. Bob and Janie stood up anxiously. "I really feel like going now. Please don't worry about me. Please . . . just let me leave — quietly!" As I walked away, Bobby started to follow me. "Maureen, what's the matter?"

"Please, Bobby!" I insisted. "Please don't ask questions. I don't . . . feel well, and I'd like to leave. Please don't interrupt your picnic . . . just let me leave by myself."

They stared at me in amazement. I walked quickly, anxious to reach the park's exit. The wet grass and the dripping leaves glistened and sparkled in the sunlight, and people were beginning to enter the park in large numbers. But my only feeling as I passed the green fields and the laughing children was one of hopeless despair.



As I approached the end of the park, I stopped and looked at the old weather tower. Water was dripping from the warped shingles on its roof. Now that the whole rocky projection was bathed in sunlight, the tower seemed more insignificant than ever. I turned abruptly and strode out of the park.

When I reached the sidestreet leading up to my apartment, I stopped and leaned against a traffic sign, and stared at the rain-slicked street shining in the sunlight. My head was throbbing, and my dulled senses were hopelessly confused. What did it all mean? The only thing I knew was that I felt as if I had been brutally violated. Not by Peter's embrace — that was nothing new to me. Yet the taste of violation was pungent on my tongue, in my body.

I was distracted from my reverie by the heavy whooshing noise of a large street cleaning machine that was turning the corner. I stared in amazement, as if hypnotized by this strange yellow monster. The huge revolving brushes gliding over the foam-covered street, the frothy jets of water, the sun glinting off the windshield and the rusted metal — all seemed so unreal. I was torn between curiosity and chilling fear. As the machine passed by, I could see the driver — a grizzly old man — inside the cab. He was holding the wheel with one hand, and he used the other to cover his mouth, as violent coughs sent his body into spasms of convulsive shaking.

So I turned around, and began walking back towards Central Park.

FOUR WHO ENTERED PARADISE

Jeffrey Irwin Roth

And it shall be like a tree
Planted along streams of water
That brings forth fruit in season
And whose leaf does not wither,
And whatever it shall do will prosper.

— Psalm 1;3

Four entered Paradise, namely: Ben Azzai,, Ben Zoma, Another, and R. Akiva. R. Akiva said to them: When you arrive at the stones of pure marble, say not, 'Water, water!' For it is said: He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before Mine eyes.

Ben Azzai cast a look and died.

Ben Zomma looked and became demented.

Another cut down the sapling.

R. Akiva departed unhurt

— Hagigah 14b

Characters:

NARRATOR, A, B, C, D, G

(As the curtain rises, the dim light of the stage reveals four skull-capped young men seated behind two long tables piled randomly with large folio volumes of rabbinic texts, such as the Talmud, Mishneh Torah, and Midrash. They are dressed casually and comfortably as if prepared for long hours of work and intense concentration. While the curtain is rising, they are seen in the traditional motions of study: one rocks gently back and forth; another turns pages in his text; another moves his lips as if reciting passages to himself; the fourth searches for a book among those piled before him. These motions are varied and natural as the curtain rises, and performed in silence. Their eyes remain focused on the pages, and their intense involvement and absorption in the study is evident.)

(The NARRATOR, who speaks the monologues, appears and enters a circle of bright light towards the front, right, of the stage. The four stop their motions and remain frozen in their places throughout the monologue. The NARRATOR is also dressed casually, and he delivers the monologues not as oration, but as conversation. He makes no gestural reference to the four seated behind him.)

(MONOLOGUE #1)

NARRATOR: Did you ever wonder what it must feel like to be a carnation?
I don't mean a lush, bright, splendid carnation
That you buy at the florist

And bring to your date in a plastic, transparent box;
I mean that same carnation after the date is over,
After a week or month perhaps,
After she's wrapped it in wax paper
And put it between the pages of some thick book
In order to preserve it.
It looks flat and withered,
Pale and lifeless and dry,
Worn and entirely lacking the good natured cheerfulness it
once possessed.

The book pressed the life out of the carnation;
Though meant to preserve it, it denied it room to live;
Confined within the narrow straight-jacket of black-lettered pages
It could not hope to grow, or even be maintained.
Could this be the carnation's appointed task?

(The NARRATOR's circle of light disappears, and he retreats off-stage. The stage itself gradually becomes lighter.)

("B" puts down his book, stands, and paces before the tables. The other three also stop studying and listen attentively to what is being said.)

(SCENE 1)

B: Last night I thought the light was flickering.
It seemed to waver unsteadily as I tried to read,
Not alternating in extremes from black to white
But shifting restlessly to uncertain shades of gray.
I think the light has been dimming for some time
And if we don't attend to it quickly
It may go out forever.

C: I've noticed the same thing myself.
I think we need a whole new source of light.
We've been using the same old lamp for quite some time now.
Perhaps it's outlived its usefulness
And should be replaced.
Something more modern might be better.
After all, improvements are being made every day
And I don't think we should totally disregard them,
Especially when they might be to our benefit
And make things easier for us.

D: I don't have any trouble seeing things in this light.
Most things are pretty clear to me the way I see them now.
But I'll admit the small print in these books can be terrifically
hard on your eyes.
I mean, squinting all the time to make out the notes in the margin.
I sometimes wonder whether it's worth all the trouble.
Reading something else might not be so difficult,
And if we did, perhaps you'd find that the light is not at all
inadequate
For sensible subjects.

A *(first to D)*: I don't think you're making sense.
If the light were truly adequate, it wouldn't make any difference
what you were reading:
Everything would appear clear and easily understood.

(To B and C): And if you're really having trouble.
I don't think it's with the light
But with your perception.

The light we have is old, but guaranteed by the Maker.
We haven't exactly neglected it over the years, either.
Sometimes we've viewed it from one angle, sometimes from another
And generally it's adapted to our needs.
But still, you have to remember one thing: Light doesn't bend;
It doesn't curve around corners or pass through brick walls;
It takes a set course and can be stopped, but never diverted.
This arrangement is bound to produce inconveniences for us,
But we can no more change the physical properties of light
Than create the universe from nothing.

D: But what about the books?
Sometimes, as I'm studying, I feel the books
Spread before me on the table
Are soaking in more light than they're shedding.
They seem to greedily absorb the light
Rather than reflect it back to me.
A: You're denying physical properties again.
The white pages don't absorb light
But diffuse it in countless directions,
Depending on the angle in which you hold the book.
Some of it is bound to hit your eyes.
Unless you keep them closed as you study
There's no reason why the pages should be blank to you.

B: But what about the letters?
A (*turning abruptly, as if startled*): The letters?
D: Yes, the letters, the letters.
The letters that form the words and sentences.
The letters that form the ideas.
The black, parasitic letters that reflect nothing
But totally ingest the fullness of the light.

A: The letters?
D: Yes, the black, thick letters that cause the pages to sag with weight
And make it difficult for us to turn them when we're tired.
The letters whose sharp angles prick our eyes mercilessly
And deaden our ability to see.
The letters whose gradual curves are misleading,
For though they appear graceful and easily followed
They weary one through endless mazes of descent.
What about the letters that darken every page?
Do they not dim our light?

A: Perhaps . . . perhaps, indeed, they do.
(*The stage darkens, and a last ray of light lingers on the pensive face of "A". After a moment, this, too, blacks-out.*)
(*The NARRATOR's circle of light reappears, and he delivers the second monologue in the same manner as before.*)

(MONOLOGUE #2)

NARRATOR: Who's to blame if the carnation looks withered?
After all, everything loses some of its newness
After it's been used. (Pause)

Remember how you put it in the refrigerator
So it would be fresh until you gave it to your date?
But how long can you keep a carnation in the refrigerator?
Cool air might keep it fresh for a while,

But sooner or later it's bound to turn into a bottle of milk
or a tangerine.

Besides, cool air is vigorous and brisk —
Not at all like the tropical climate a carnation is used to.

Anyway, it looks withered now, and whose fault is it?
Should you blame the florist from whom you bought it,
Or the author of the book between whose leaves it was pressed?
Perhaps you should blame the carnation itself
For not finding its own way to keep alive.
Or perhaps you should complain to the Maker that His carnation
has not withstood the test of the book,
Especially if He's guaranteed it
And Himself given you the book of its fatal preservation.
Perhaps you should storm His door and demand an explanation.
I don't know; I suppose some people would.

(*The NARRATOR's circle of light disappears.*)
(*The stage itself is relit dimly in a deep tone of rich blue light. The tables have been moved back, and the four are standing towards the front of the stage in a semicircle, with "A" in the center. Each is enwrapped in a woolen tallit — a full length, fringed prayer shawl with prominent thick, black stripes which is draped over the head and back but does not cover the face. In addition, "A" is garbed in a white kittie — a long outer gown that entirely covers his clothes. At the outset, their hands are folded before them, but this position varies with what is spoken. All their actions should aim to dramatize the following scene and add to its variety.*)

(*Those sections marked "ALL" are chanted by the four in unison. What is spoken during the Preparation for Ascent and the Ascent itself should be intoned with proper attention for the essence of effective mystical formulae.*)

(SCENE II)

(Preparation for Ascent)

ALL (*intensely*): L-RD L-RD G-D MERCY GRACE FORBEARANCE

TRUTH

(*softly*): 1-rd 1-rd g-d mercy grace forbearance kindness truth

(*intensely*): L-RD L-RD G-D

A: MERCY

B: GRACE

C: FORBEARANCE

D: KINDNESS

ALL: TRUTH!

A: May the words of our mouth

And the purification of our soul

Be acceptable to He Who created the World by his word

(*"A" bends down and traces a semicircle in the ground before him with his index finger. As he is bending down, the three behind him hold the corners of his tallit and thus lift it off his shoulders so that it remains suspended horizontally above him as a canopy while his tracing continues. After the semicircle is completed, "A" traces several letters within the expanse of its arc. This completed, he rises into his tallit which the three drape over him as before. The entire action takes only a few seconds.*)

(*Next "A" walks around the other three, who remain in their places as he recites the following verse:*)

A (*circling the three*):

So He exists

Not in substance
But in the Word
And the Word is G-d

("A" returns to his place in the middle of the semicircle, and the three walk around him in single file, reciting the following verse:)

B, C, D: So He exists
Not in the substance
But in the Word
And the Word is G-d

(After the three regain their former positions in the semicircle, all continue in unison:)

ALL: ABSENT CORPOREALITY
POTENT SENSUALITY
OPERANT MENTALITY
MANIFEST LEGALITY
DOMINANT REGALITY
ABSOLUTE MORALITY
ULTIMATE REALITY —

A: TO YOU WE NOW ASCEND

(The following sections of the Ascent should not be spoken as the rote recitation of a devotional service, but as an effective means of securing living and dynamic mystical communion and inspiration. Thus, the following lines should be uttered differently from all other lines of the play. They may be sung in the mode of a plain chant, mounting in crescendo with the increasing intensity of the ray of white light that will appear after the first stage of the Ascent. Under no circumstances should the chant lapse into a monotonous singsong that would fail to convey the emotional fervor experienced in reciting the essential attributes of the Divine in conjuring its essence.)

(The four rotate clockwise so that "B" is forward in the circle. This is the essential attributes of the Divine in conjuring its essence.)

(Ascent: 1)

B: Absent Corporeality:
Your substance has no matter
Your organs lack dimension
Your features lack description
Yet the joints of your non-existent body connect infinity
Your power needs no motive force behind it
Your motions are effortless:

Thus be your essence imperceptable —
ALL: TO YOU WE NOW ASCEND

(As these last words are uttered, a dim ray of white light appears at one end of the stage. Each subsequent stage of the Ascent is concluded as this ray of white light increases slightly in intensity.)

(Ascent: 2)

C: Potent Sensuality:
Your voluptuous abundance overpowers those who receive the benefits of your plenty
Your benevolence vouchsafes bounty
Your virile grace surpasses all expectations of mercy and favor:
Thus does your love impregnate goodness —
ALL TO YOU WE NOW ASCEND

(Ascent: 3)

D: Operant Mentality:
Your thought determines existence
Your wisdom works infinity

Your intelligence initiates diversity even as your knowledge creates harmony
Your foresight propels history

Your prodigal perception produces prosperity:
Thus does your understanding evoke finite reality —
ALL: TO YOU WE NOW ASCEND

(Ascent: 4)

A: Manifest Legality:
Your prudent judgement stands unchallenged
Your decree is irrevocable
Your code is structured to effect all necessary ends
Your rule channels impulsive reason
Your ordinance infuses life as value emanates from your statute:
Thus does your revealed law determine nature's action and deportment —
ALL: TO YOU WE NOW ASCEND

(Ascent: 5)

C: Dominant Regality:
Your kingship rests on majesty
Rooted in the might of absolute dominion
Your sovereignty is indisputable as your lordship is universally acknowledged:
Thus is your reign established to eternity —
ALL: TO YOU WE NOW ASCEND

(Ascent: 6)

B: Absolute Morality:
Your virtue is the source of full authority
The right of your existence lends validity to the trappings of existence
Your temperance in creation motivates purity in the created
Your ethics of action multiply merit to mortals:
Thus be your justice the foundation of all compassion —
ALL: TO YOU WE NOW ASCEND

(Ascent: 7)

A: Ultimate Reality:
Your unqualified existence grants stability to the finite
Through your vital presence is all intelligence directed
Your absolute nature decrees the subordination of all matter
Your canons of beauty erupt in imperatives of truth:
Thus is your ineffable essence self-existent —
ALL: TO YOU WE NOW ASCEND
(The following lines are spoken by "A" and the three simultaneously)

A: So He exists
Not in the Substance
But in the Word
And the Word is G-d

B, C, D: L-RD L-RD G-D

MERCY GRACE FOREBEARANCE KINDESS TRUTH

ALL: ABSENT CORPOREALITY
POTENT SENSUALITY
OPERANT MENTALITY
MANIFEST LEGALITY
DOMINANT REGALITY
ABSOLUTE MORALITY
ULTIMATE REALITY —

TO YOU WE HAVE ASCENDED!

(As these last words are spoken, the dim blue light disappears and the stage is plunged into total darkness, except for the ray of white light that has been increasing in intensity since the beginning of the Ascent. This white light is now tremendously powerful, especially in contrast to the blackened stage. "G" appears from the darkness and steps into this ray of white light. He is smoking a slender cigar. He should not be portrayed as the garrulous-boorish-business tycoon type, but dressed immaculately in a fashionable suit, he should have an appearance of efficiency.)

(The NARRATOR's circle of light appears somewhat downstage of "G's" circle, and on the opposite side of the stage. The NARRATOR appears and delivers his monologue as before.)

(MONOLOGUE #3)

NARRATOR: Was it right to uproot the carnation at all?
Perhaps it never should have been plucked from the ground.
I wonder if He who plants the carnation
Knows it is destined to be misused.
Of course, He can't be blamed for what others do,
But what if He ruins the carnation Himself?
Suppose He commands His carnation to live,
Then tears down the stem and pulls out the roots.
He promises it full glory and splendor
But limits its water and cuts off the light.
Does He lie when He says the carnation will grow?
If so, why plant the carnation at all?
Of course, it's His
And we can't question why He mistreats what He owns.
He may even have some definite plan
That accounts for the way His carnation is used.
But we have to think out these things for ourselves
And can't overlook what appears to be wrong.
At least it would do no harm to find out.

(The NARRATOR's circle of light disappears.)

(The stage is relit in white light. The tables piled with books still appear in the background, and a stately chair has been brought downstage right in which "G" occasionally sits. The four always stands, although they appear relaxed now that the difficult Ascent is over. They are wearing neither the tallit nor kittie but are dressed as in Scene 1.)

(During MONOLOGUE #3, "G" has been standing in his circle of light on stage. This circle now merges with the white light of the stage itself. The four are seen standing somewhat upstage, "G" turns to them and says:)

(SCENE III)

G: Gentlemen, I'm pleased to see that you have arrived safely. I know you have some urgent matters to discuss.

A: We do.

B: Concerning the light.

C: Concerning the books.

D: Concerning our task.

G: I always begin in the beginning and find it an admirable way to proceed.

D: Perhaps we might first consider the nature of our work . . .

G: I always begin in the beginning and find it an admirable way to

(To B): What bothers you about the light?

B *(hesitating)*: It's hard to be certain about such delicate matters
But it seems that the light has been unconstant as of late.

I'm not saying that we have ever been submerged into total darkness,
But the brilliance that we once experienced has been dimmed by clouds.

G: Then by what right do you charge the light?

It may still radiate as richly as before
But be obscured by clouds of lingering doubt.
Dispell these clouds and once again behold
The nature of pure wisdom and true duty.

D: But after all, we're just ordinary men;
Our capacities are neither phenomenal nor deficient.
If we can't read by the light as it is
Then we're not to blame,
But the light must be summoned
And found guilty of not discharging its task.

A: Who's the more criminal according to you?

Would you cover the light with black layers of thought
And then blame it for not getting through to your eyes?
The darkness we see does not come from the light
But comes from ourselves whose truth it reflects.
The original light is as bright as before
Though not all perceive it as clearly as those
Who recognize truth as it was from creation.

G: Then let's go on to your second complaint.

(To C): What bothers you about the books?

C *(thoughtfully)*: It's strange how one grows to disregard pain.
Someone may beat you for only so long
Until you go numb and all pain is forgotten.
So have we sat bent by these books
For thousands of years, forgetting their weight,
Until we look up from the text for a moment
And see how we're stunted in numberless places,
Confined by the margins of yellowing pages,
Never to venture beyond their clear limits.
All that exceeds them has passed our minds by,
And we have been scorned for being constrained
By chains of paper, centuries old.

D: We've not only been scorned for maintaining these books
But slaughtered for them without any cause.
And when others have not hastened our end,
The books have completed that task by themselves.
They've stifled us in the depth of their pages
And drowned us under dry masses of ink.
They've overwhelmed us with duties and works
That just can't be borne by man who is flesh.

G: Are you suffocated by the air that surrounds you?
Would you say that one's life is the cause of his death?
Or does not your very existence depend
On how the thick air that you breathe is maintained.
These books are the very source of your life.
Through wearing these chains you gain infinite freedom
To act without fear of serving your lusts.
By sustaining these books you fulfill your own selves.

What makes one person unlike another
If not the traits that distinguish between them?

Without these books you would have no clear features;
You would look the same as everyone else;
Without them you would cease to exist.
But execute the terms of these books and create
An identity distinct from the rest of mankind.

Who said that man is nothing but flesh?
He is spirit as well and exists by his spirit.

A: But how can the spirit be bound by these books?
And whose image do these books help create?
Do they act for our sake or for their own?

Sometimes, while learning, I see hundreds of letters
Leap from the page and form circles around me.
They taunt me instead of provide for my being.
I want to escape from the sphere of their power
And create things of value free from restraint.

G: The world was created with these letters —
Does this not have value and ultimate worth? —
Yet the universe is ruled by law and restraint.
Nothing exceeds its inherent restrictions,
But this does not mean it's unable to act.

Do your limited senses check your free will?
Do you feel constrained by the fact that you breathe?
Is your freedom denied because you must eat?

These letters contain all the power or creation
But work within limits set by their nature.
Thus man may act within his potential,
Freely to live and to think and to hope.

A: Hope? Hope is a nymphomaniac
That clings to you long after you should think it satiated
With life's grief and sorrow.
Man can always hope.

But how can he be content with himself?

G: Let him see things as they really exist.
Reality does not exist in the mind
But exists absolute — independent of man.
He may be asleep, yet the sun is still shining;
He may be dead, but life still goes on.
He must only absorb its reflections, or draw
Truth from the ultimate source of all being.
If he uses the light to see things as they are
He'll be content with himself who can be no different.

("G" has walked to the tables which have remained pushed into the darkened background of the stage. He lifts one of the large volumes deposited there, holds it before the four, and says:)

Look deeply into this fountain of life.
Tell me the image that here meets your eyes.

D: I see water.

B: I see steam.

C: I see ice.

A: I see them all.

D: I see rushing waters of ruin and destruction
That beguile the eyes with trickles of moisture;
Promising peaceful paths of pure pleasure

They dash one to pieces in torrents of power.
Relentelessly surging from overflowed bounds
They submerge whomever they find in their course
Wave after wave of billowing didates
Gushing from geysers formed in the darkness,
Regarding not man for whom they were made
To quench all his thirst for ultimate value.

Driven before them I cannot withstand
The thrust of their merciless drive for right action.
I am Another and thus shall I be.

("D" turns from the forward portion of the stage, paces towards the rear, and remains standing there motionless with his back towards the others.)

B: I see wandering whisps of cloudy white steam
Floating around me and searing my head,
Clogging the channels of truthful perception,
Limiting vision in warm, foggy mist.
My thoughts flit about me on vapors of air,
Wafted through currents of filmy directives,
Confused in the haze of divergent opinions,
Choked by the fumes of the burning of scholars.
How flimsy is the fine thread of faith
That is buffeted through the harsh steam of oppression!

I can't understand the truth of creation;
I can't bear the notion of dying for threads.

("B" turns, repeating the actions of "D," but coming to stand opposite him on the other side of the stage, also with his back towards the front of the stage.)

C: I see cold cubes of ice in static formation,
Not to be reached by light covered with clouds,
Not to be melted by anyone present,
The heritage granted by cold men of wisdom,
Frozen forever in unbending harshness;
The warmth of true feeling replaced by the chill
Of logic and reason in crystallized points.
Immovably locked in a glacier of statutes
Solidly placed in cement of the ages.
Clear and transparent and easily seen
But sharp jagged edges piecing the soul.

I feel as cold as the death of emotion.

("C" turns, paces to the rear of the stage, and joins "B" standing with his back towards the front.)

G (to A): And you, you of perfect faith,
What do you see?

A: I see them all; I see them all;
But not as they see them do I see them all.

I see the waters too,
But living waters sustaining all creation,
Refreshing the created,
Flowing reverently from the Source of all existence,
Inundating fertile minds and wills with action,
Soothing the sore sadness of sure scorn,
Cooling the burnt wounds of hard defeat.

I see the steam as well,
But mighty steam rising to the heights,

White and quickly scattered by the wind,
Delicate vapor of our transient state,
Heading upward to a different sphere,
Carrying with it all the hopes of men
And aspirations of a better time.

I see the ice as well,
Preserving for eternity the wisdom of the ages,
Solid base of action and deportment,
Holding on to what is best of old,
Yet melting to the light of each day.

I see them all;
But not as they see them do I see them all.

*(As "A" recites this final line, the other three exit slowly at the rear.
"G" turns to "A" and says:)*

G: But you, you of perfect faith,
Yet stay, for we are two left alone
To seek the nature of the task.
For water may be whole unto itself:
It seeks its own level and concerns no other.
So may steam rise above the good
And ice may float on top of all demands.
So may you sit alone and thus fulfill
The nature of your very sacred self.
But nothing that exists is unrelated:
What is steam but ice, or ice but steam,
Or water but the both of them together?
Then who are you but someone else besides?
Is not his essence just the same as yours
Though forms may vary in each of the states?
But if you sit alone behind these books
How will you ever meet your other selves?

So learn what has been written down before —
Thus will you find the nature of your self
And gain the awesome power to create —
But you must learn from life as well as books.
These books are not the ends unto themselves
Detached from all concerns of human life,
But they maintain the pulse of righteous action;
They were written to provoke the just encounter
Of each person and those kindred to his nature.
If they scorn you, you have scorned yourself,
And if they strike you, you have dealt the blow.
Yet must you act to them as to yourself
By putting into practice what you learn
And transforming dry directives into springs of living water.
So will these books refreshen their poor state
And by this good your self shall be complete.

Go to this work of living man to man
For so is your appointed task decreed.

("G" finishes speaking and watches as "A" turns towards the back of the stage and walks to a place behind the tables of books. "A" does not sit down but selects a text from the table and begins studying as he stands upstage. "G" then seats himself in his chair downstage, half-facing the audience, and continues smoking his cigar.)

(During the above action, the white light of the stage has changed to a pale blue, similar to that present during the Ascent.)

(The NARRATOR's circle of white light reappears downstage opposite "G" chair. The NARRATOR appears and delivers his final monologue as before. Both "A" and "G" are visible during the course of this monologue through the dim blue light.)

(MONOLOGUE #4)

NARRATOR: Can a carnation live, pressed in a book?

I guess it can
If the book is more than just paper and ink;
If its cover is soft and develops with growth;
If it's bound without limits of staples or glue
But the margins expand to the branching of notions.
If the book is the source of the carnation's power —

The fertile soil that engenders creation,
Watered by foamy white pages that flow
In billowy waves of incessant incentive;
Warmed in the nurture of brilliant ideals
That penetrate actions aimed for the good —
So rooted it stands with determined intention
In solid foundation of life and deportment.

But if the carnation pulls up its roots,
Detaching itself from the source of existence,
Plucking off buds that are needed for growth,
How can it hope to advance or to prosper?
Surely its fate is to wither, or worse:
To lose every trace of its singular self.

So must it cling to the base of right action
And learn what it means to be a carnation.

(The NARRATOR's circle of light disappears and he retreats off-stage. The blue light of the stage fades into total darkness. As the curtain descends, the only light that remains visible is the point of light at the tip of "G's" cigar.)

Night Of Watching

Lewis E. Koplowitz

I

I searched in the closet and found my books there
Where I'd left them last Passover with ultimate care
To keep then all shiny and leather-smooth

for seder.

But now on the covers, where neatly had lain
A coat of rich oil to bring out the grain
Were grains of dust — a note from G-d

for seder:

Time turns unturned leaves of books
Or unwatched watered grain to the same sour dust
in the order of things.

II

Where
Oh, where
Oh where is G-d?
Searching for crumbs
With a feather and spoon
In the April corners
of a candlelit room.

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