

Book of Dreams - Part 1



A M E M O I R

THE BOOK OF DREAMS - PART ONE

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The BOOK OF DREAMS began as a simple journal. Suzanne gave to me a magical leather-bound book with fabulous handmade paper pages, as a gift. I filled it up with my most memorable dream stories. Intrigued by how these stories related to my waking life, I began studying what others had discovered about the meaning and usefulness of dreams.



These pages contain more than a recounting of dreams. I've added explanations about how certain dreamed emotions, impressions and actions relate to my Real Life. This is why I've called the book a "memoir." I've also tried to bring to approximate some of the tangential thoughts that occur within my dreams by using illustrations.

Dreamspace is an innerspace continuum in which we discover ways of future being, as well as find new interpretations regarding our past. My dreams, I've discovered, lend me a profound momentum towards courage and creativity.

Most of the major moments of my life (up to age 50 or so) are chronicled, not by design, but simply as a by-product of dream interpretation. Not the "where" and "when" and "how" so much as the "why" and "what if *not*." I've also deliberately kept myself from interpreting certain aspects of each dream, certain passages in the text. But hints to what is missing remain. The poetry of dreams is sometimes too precious to analyze. Sometimes, the *riddle* is, itself, the key metaphor. Sometimes, the *innocence* of an action, free of annotation, is the doorway to the true experience.

I hope you enjoy mixing your dreams with mine. We can't help it, really.

Book of Dreams

A M E M O I R

**Those who look outward, dream.
Those who look inward, awaken.
- Carl Jung**

**The seeker asked, "Where is heaven?"
The teacher replied, "Heaven is within."
- The Bible (condensed version)**

**A dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that has not been opened.
- The Talmud**

**A dream is an answer to a question we haven't yet learned how to ask.
- Fox Mulder**

**A dream is a scripture, and many scriptures are nothing but dreams.
- Umberto Eco**

**Myth is the public dream, and dream is the private myth.
- Joseph Campbell**

**He felt that his whole life was some kind of dream
and he sometimes wondered whose it was and whether they were enjoying it.
- Douglas Adams**

**Hope is a waking dream.
- Aristotle**

1. THE DREAM OF WAITING FOR A NARRATOR

Often, in dreams, I am quite still. And the dreamscape around me is only half complete. Sometimes, I realize both the character ‘me’ in my dream (the metaphor through which I see) and the ‘I’ that is able to watch from above have both *stopped breathing*. That is when I am listening too intently.

Even when I’m aware of myself as dream actor/director, I don’t want to be the conscious *author*. I want to let my unconscious do the writing, my *beyond self*, my hidden mind. I want to be surprised, enthralled. So I listen. Such a dream is the first one I recorded:

I dream I am waiting for a narrator.

I wait with a novel held loosely in one hand, my index finger bookmarking my place, a finger in a dike, holding back the chaos of being lost by a flood of unnumbered pages. I’m never able to relax when I hold a book like that (until I’ve slipped a marker of some kind into place, or until I open the book and begin reading again, confident I’ve not missed any passages).

I cannot trust memory.

In Real Life, I choose special items as bookmarks: apropos photos, important receipts, ticket stubs, carefully folded candy wrappers (back when I ate candy, before my brother and father both had their second heart attacks and I decided it was time to pay more attention to my diet). However, in *this dream* I use my finger and, therefore, I’m quite reluctant to put down my book. And it’s not a small book. It’s a heavy, worn novel in which I’ve written things in the margins and on the insides of the covers, front and back. A book I don’t want to lose. This handicaps me if the dream turns into a thriller-espionage action dream. (I often have thriller-espionage action dreams.) I’d prefer having both hands free. Nonetheless, I cannot bring myself to let go.

I never see myself actually reading the book. I can’t even recall what the book is about (although I know I would remember if I could stop being distracted by the knowledge that I’ve stopped breathing). I’m standing, waiting for a Narrative Presence to wrap around me like the arms of Durga (the beautiful, multiple armed warrior goddess - *see image on left*). I feel a marvelous sense of **anticipation**. A swirling Kama Sutra gasp, like the spiraling arms of the solar system, spin around me. I am standing in the eye of this evolutionary hurricane. At its core: **the magnetism of swirling sunlight I so cherished from the backyard of my childhood**, a visceral memory always waiting just beneath the skin. When I stand like that, I am ~~Adam~~ breathlessly awaiting a new **EDEN**.



I don't realize it at the time, but I am not expecting the narrator to speak. Not in words. Not any more than I expect my own mind to use formal speech when I search it for answers. Not when I want to really *know* something.

I want the narrator in my dream to *really know*.

So I listen. very. carefully.

And I keep my finger in place.

And my eyes don't blink (or, at least, they try not to).

And I realize just how long I haven't been breathing. I get worried.

In this dream, I am not so certain I am dreaming.

I wake up, gasping for air.

It's the middle of the night. Everything is still.

It's harder to remember dreams when they happen in the middle of the night. So long until morning... when I can hold a pencil, again in my hand, and write it down.

I have a fear of floating away. I turn and find my wife's shoulder. The motion of my hand sliding under her shirt sleeve is euphoric. The feel of her skin calms me. I'm able to fall back asleep.



2. THE DREAM OF THE BULLET-PROOF TENT

I awake. Without motion. An effortless transition from sleep to wakefulness. I'm inside my windowless cocoon, alone. On my back, my nose and two eyes form a small triangle of alertness, the only part of me poking out of my mummy-style sleeping bag (the rest of me, including my muffled ears, nestles within, insulated). I smell the full-bodied air of the forest as it mingles with the slight tang of my orange pup tent. My nostrils flair, one at a time, breathing in clandestine silence.

My eyes search for the seams. (I'm always wary of mosquitoes, ticks, spiders). I love watching patterns and the movement of wind when I first awake. My eyes are two inverted Celtic spotlights, druid eyes, lit yet covert. Wherever I glance, I throw a bluish glow, potentially giving me away, but I cannot bring myself to close my eyes or calm my nostrils.

I'm immediately *certain* that the thin skin of my nylon tent is **bullet proof**. Even a bear's Old Testament claws and Jack the Ripper madness would be unable to shred these impenetrable flame-retardant fibers. I am certain, yet...

Leaning shadows might spell doom, especially out here in the middle of nowhere, beyond all normal campgrounds. A prowling bear with an uncanny ability to smell (bordering on ESP, I'm sure) could easily shift its weight onto the tent, searching for where I've hidden my dirty socks crushing me. (Bears love dirty socks. My feet sweat more than most.)

Bears require a different strategy than mosquitoes...

My mind imagines failure:

I fantasize claws, blood, shouting, my face contorted in the corner. Diagonal streaks, lightning bolts of jagged jail bars, shattering the darkness, as if the ripping claws have cut through the very fabric of space-time, spilling out new dimensions over my rumpled sleeping bag... I believe I can fake the bear into thinking I'm still asleep. He would leave me alone, right? What would be the sport in ravaging a sleeping camper alone in his tiny pup tent? Anyway, my tent is bullet proof. I only need to worry about one sitting on me. I think I could survive being sat on.

Violence is sucked like guilty demons back into a subliminal world. Reality remains: Nothing can penetrate. I am safe. *Horrors are never Real*.

As if to prove my conviction, just outside, moss-laden alien predators pass through the campsite, hunting anything that moves. They see my orange tent, the ultra-violet body heat glowing within, and shoot. Their bullets are absorbed. Like light into a monolith. It is 2001.

More than bullet proof!

Whole armies maneuver through the campsite, bombs escalating the scene, illuminating the treetops. The flare of gunfire reflects off the aluminum pots (in which I had boiled pea soup and tea water earlier) hanging from a tree limb, cleaned, cached. Thick leather boots with soles

of nails trample over dead embers and abandoned sticks. (I'd also roasted marshmallows.) The soldiers weave around everything as if my low slung tent is protected by a **Romulan** cloaking device. I am invisible to them.

My tent is an oasis in the night. (An oasis within an oasis).

As soon as each horror realizes it has no potency, it *disappears*. Silence returns. My nostrils breathe calmly, self-satisfied (and, unlike in waking life, congestion free, no allergies or rhinitis. I rarely suffer any health issues in dreams. Certainly not within my bullet proof tent. Not even mold can find a way in.)

I feel only slight guilt that I have no need to fight back, that it is my passivity, not my **CUNNING** or **STRENGTH**, that wins the day.

My curious eyes return to scanning the sagging ceiling of my tent, throwing their warm glow, confident, no longer caring about being noticed. My mind's eye is able to see beyond, through to the silhouetted trees, the wash of brilliant stars. As my vision extends, I float, outward...

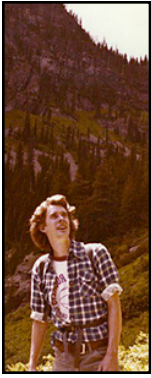
...and I'm crouching on a thick branch, Tarzan-like, my elongated shadow mingling with the dark wilderness beyond the campsite.



The dream gains an aspect of heightened importance, like someone touching my shoulder, turning me from reverie, pulling me into a place of *meaningful need*. Before this moment, everything had been preparatory entertainment, advertisement. Now, the real movie starts. (What was it I came to see?)

I watch the Moon pour living light across a world of barely legible color, when suddenly it speaks, startling me.

“Tobin.”



I'd been reading Tarzan earlier that evening, aloud, mixing thrill and fantasy with the rustling night breezes, reading to my three year old son (who, as you've noticed, is not in the dream. I dreamed this dream in 2000, even though the setting is c. 1983, and even though I think, in the dream, it is 2001. Maybe that's why my ex-wife is also missing from the dream, since, in 2000, I was in Manhattan and she was in Wisconsin. The orange pup tent is the same one we used to backpack with, together, 20 years earlier.) While reading, my son and I learned that Tarzan had been searching for God - so that he could prove himself greater than God - and had sought Him in the Moon.

The ape-man, upright upon a slender, swaying limb, raised his bronzed face to the silver orb. Now that he had clambered to the highest point within his reach, he discovered, to his surprise, that Goro [the Moon] was as far away as when he viewed him from the ground. Was Goro attempting to elude him? "Come, Goro!" he cried, "Tarzan of the Apes will not harm you!" But still the moon held aloof.

We were both, my son and I, disappointed that the Moon hadn't replied. We'd gone on a tangent, given the moon a voice, imagined Goro as the **God of Historical Witness**, a salty being with a pitted complexion and a taste for pickled herring. A being exhausted by the weight of having seen so much; no longer connected to time and change, since it had lost count of change and lost interest in time. Yet a being who, even in its ancient malaise, found Tarzan fascinating. Just as we did.

The voice in my dream doesn't come from the sky. That would have comforted me, validated something already concluded. Instead, the voice comes from just behind the side of my right ear. A voice as quiet as a whisper yet not at all hushed.

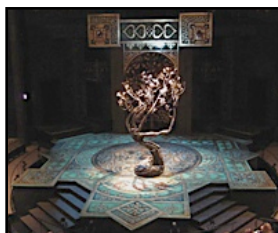
~~"Tobin, you were wrong about that. About the bear."~~

I'm so startled, my dream skips the part where I tumble from my perch. I am already suspended one inch above the ground, slightly eschew, my cheek bone close enough to the earth to feel the cold gravity of it. The rust of rotting leaves burns my eyes. My neck hurts. I right myself, as if squirming inside a plasma forcefield. (Yoda would've been proud.) One inch above the forest floor, I'm appreciative of the warmth that tiny layer of air provides. I know how uncomfortable the damp ground can be.

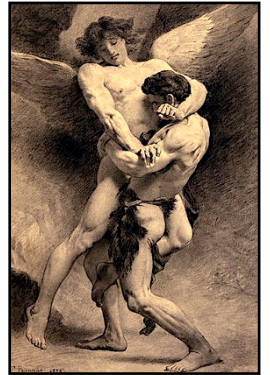
The Voice, unfallen, is still up among the branches where I'd been crouching. I'm relieved. I hadn't liked the voice so close.

While I'm still figuring out how to balance an inch above the ground, I look back toward the voice. I expect to see a moon that resembled an illustrated version of Humpty Dumpty, not because the Voice speaks in nursery rhymes, but because Humpty had been roundish like the moon, only with arms and legs and a mouth. (Or maybe it's because I'd just taken a tumble and wanted sympathy, a **BROTHERHOOD OF THE BROKEN AND PUT BACK TOGETHER**.)

Instead, the Voice comes from an older man, squatting like King Arthur surveying Camelot from



the safety of a tree. Seeing the man



Jacob Wrestling with the Angel
by Léon Bonnat

makes the sound of the Voice change. It now resembles Richard Harris...

"About the bear. You're wrong about her. And many other things."

I find this disconcerting. And rather annoying. I am a confident fellow who doesn't much like being wrong. I thought the bear was male. The Moon must be speaking in riddles, if not outright symbolism.

What could the bear symbolize, besides menace or threat? I make a mental list:

- ✓ *Bears are capable of spending long periods of time alone, hibernating...*
- ✓ *Bears strike me as a creatures held captive by repetitive behaviors [witness: bears in the zoo];*
- ✓ *This bear, if female, had an awful lot of male characteristics, although those claws did look well manicured...*

Of course, I realize all these thoughts are wildly stereotypical, but I have them nonetheless.

"It likes to dance alone," continues the Moon.

A dancing bear. I think of author John Irving, his stories of strong women who don't need (or want) men in their lives. A workaholic dancing bear with manicured claws.

The Moon keeps talking. I recall something about floral couches and extending the size of the garden and who should be responsible to write thank you notes after dinner parties. I stop listening.

I'm distracted by another Voice winking from my shoulder, a wispy tinkle that reminds me of my mother. This is a voice I expect to hear close to my ear, so it brings comfort. (My mother died 3 years prior to this dream. I hadn't realized how much I missed her voice.) *She is a fairy.* I don't need to look to know. In other dreams, I recall this fairy caressing my earlobe with wing-light kisses. It occurs to me that her fairy dust is what has kept me this pleasant inch above the ground for the last who knows how long.

The Moon Man on the branch above me shifts his weight, sniffing the air, sensing something. A rumbling sound. As it moves closer, I discern distant thrashing, the breaking of branches. Muffled fighting grows in intensity.

It's the bear, returned. Much larger than before, growling and spinning, backing up into a clearing just beyond the line of trees, on this side of the river. (I forgot to mention the river, down a slight slope. I'd shaven in it before making the fire and cooking dinner, earlier. I'd been



backpacking, a 3 day hike, and this clearing was the only one I could find, even though it was too close to the water to be safe from bears. Obviously. But I'd been too tired to search any further.)

The bear is standing on it's back legs, swatting attackers like a **Great Cave Ghost** fending off the **RETURNED SPIRITS OF NEANDERTHAL HUNTERS**. But it's not hunters. It's the army battalion that had fought its way through my campsite earlier, fighting the alien predators. Only, then, they'd been part of my imagination, proving how invincible my little orange pup tent was. Now, they're *real*.

An epic battle, Ancient Bear verses Modern Special Forces, dangerously close.

I recall the certainty that my tent is impervious.

I am once again back inside it. Although this time the tent has a nice size window, made of fine mosquito netting, stronger than titanium. *I can never be hurt within my dream world.*

"Are you certain about the bear?" I ask.

But what I really mean is, "Is this a dream? Am I actually asleep in a tent, dreaming this? Or am I awake in a dream, pretending to be protected by a tent? Am I really safe? And, is being safe *the point*?"

I'm not sure if I'm asking the Moon or my mother. (Their answers would surely differ.)

I never occurs to me that I might be asleep in a bed in Manhattan, alone and tentless.

"**You are accident prone, but that doesn't matter now,**" the Moon replies, using yet another Voice, looking more like my 6th grade teacher than Tarzan. "**The bear needs to dance by herself.**"

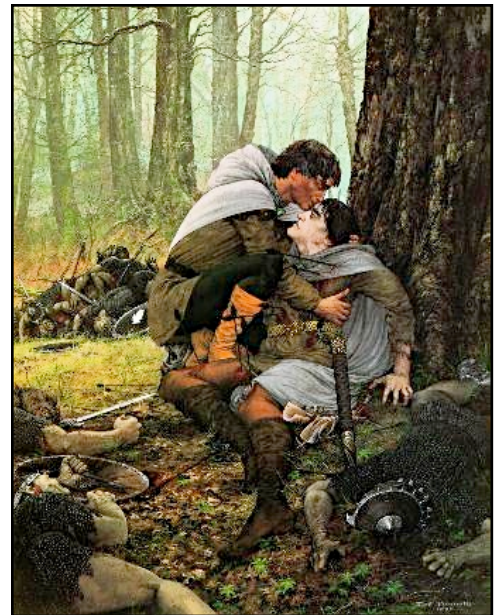
Out the window, the bear and the roving battalion dance a dangerous dance. I sense that the bear is overmatched, *Boromir* fighting for atonement, fighting to his death. I repeat to myself that she prefers to dance alone. The bear reminds me of my ex-wife, fighting off frustrations and angers, fighting to avoid stillness. Are her cubs hidden in the bushes?

I don't come to her aide. I don't know the real burden she is battling. I'm ready to open the tent flap if a cub runs my way, but none do.

I feel guilty, again, because of my inaction.

Thinking back, I realize that when I was outside the tent, beneath the Moon, I was quite tall, half as tall as the trees, consummately relaxed, *an ancient warrior*.

Inside the tent, I am smaller, much smaller, half as small as normal, the size of my son (the 1983 version), no longer cramped.



Aragorn and Boromir



In both incarnations, I feel slightly immortal, apart. Guilt cannot stick to me, like *Peter Pan's shadow*.

"I enjoy dancing, as well," I tell the Moon.

"But not alone," the Moon replies, eyes smiling, with yet another Voice. "The bear is a unicycle sort of bear. No handlebars even. No way to be seduced by passengers."

And then the Moon as Grampa John begins playing the fiddle. (Grampa John died before I was born, but everyone says I have his eyes - and his love of music.)

A Holstein and a calico cat dance overhead.

And my mother, slight as a fairy, skips around them with little girl legs, happy as heaven. I, her Peter Pan, clap as I watch from below. As I watch the world frolic.

And I laugh.

Or, I imagine myself laughing. Laughing and dancing along.

But in reality, I am standing very still in the middle of my tent. A tiny boy. Glad the bear has passed by. Sad no cubs came to play, to picnic.

"You're not as far from civilization as you think," the Moon says, and it begins playing slower, a sad Irish air, perhaps *O Danny Boy*.*

I know its true, not being far from civilization. (The presence of the army makes that all too clear. There is also a trace of asbestos in the night dew, on the tip of my tongue, like gunpowder. Time itself seems combustible.)

The Moon puts down his fiddle. He enjoys his role as Grampa, I think. A self-satisfied Voice.

"I've seen this spot, where you are camped. I've looked down on it... for more time than you can imagine. It becomes a blur, for me, watching from so old a place."

I like the Moon better now - a BROTHERHOOD OF WISDOM surrounds us.

"Where you live now, the city you call The Village, it used to be a thicker jungle than this forest."

As the Moon says these words, the orange pup tent and the taller warrior me appear in my West Village apartment. My son, now 21 years old, is playing video games on the floor, pretending to be Brett Favre, beating teams by scores like 135-7. His hair creates an impression of *Tarzan the Rockstar*. He is self-consumed.

I am aware of my other three children, so far away.

"And where you will live after this, it was once the navel of the world."

I picture rolling meadows, colors of flowers and fruit, the swaying music of aspen trees, a stone boundary (the one I imagine The Serpent used to sun himself on), and my tent rolled up, drying in the morning air.

"To me, they're all a blur," the Moon sighs.

* The is the last song Grampa John played on his banjo before he died, up in his room, on St. Patrick's Day, 1948, moments before being called to supper.

I feel sorry for the Moon. To be so old. Confused by so much loss, so much revisionism. To only know the night. But I don't feel sorry enough to want his time to end. I, too, want to never die, to call the Moon "companion." To be older than the trees. No matter how lonely that might feel.

When I think this, the Moon twinkles, one eyebrow raised. During this period of my life, when I had this dream, I was so terribly isolated, so saddened and unnerved by my first marriage's failure, I didn't care (for a few long, long months) if I lived or died. Yet during those months I was working harder than ever, rarely sleeping (or eating), writing and composing with a desperation meant to endow meaningfulness to my solitude. Working until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. Rising at 8:00 full of anxiety (*What hotel is this, now?*) and burning skin. Crossing streets without caring if a car would flatten me. The real world *was* a blur. My manic fatigue insulated me from darker depression.

"I am old," continues the Moon, talking more to himself than to me. "Time is no longer told by the growth of children. Not even by the passage of wars or the extinction of species. It has happened, all of it, so many times."

Hopping off his perch, he picks up a cup of steaming tea (he, too, must've lost his taste for coffee) from the edge of the campfire (which is suddenly alive with friendly flames, like an episode of GUNSMOKE, or STAR TREK V, THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY, the worst of the Star Trek films).

I feel as if I should say something profound. I breathe in steam through my nostrils, enjoying the movement of inhaling, content to be saying nothing.

"The truth is," he continues, "I prefer dancing with men. I'm too tired to lead."

He looks, now, somehow, like Anton, 21 years old, the one living with me in Manhattan. But with much older eyes. Anton and I had danced many times at the funk bar around the corner, and at a nearby gay disco, the best places to dance in the West Village. When dancing, I would feel no tension, no weight, no tiredness, no burning skin. I know exactly what the Moon means.

So we put down our glasses and place our arms on each other's shoulders, the Moon as Son.

I think I fall asleep swaying to and fro just before he starts to sing *O Danny Boy the pipes the pipes are calling...*

From glen to glen, and down the mountainside.
The summer's gone, and all the roses falling
'Tis you, 'tis you must go and I must bide.

I fall into the music, knowing childhood is so short, taking comfort in that change, that chance at renewal.

But come ye back when summer's in the meadow
Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow,
For I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow.
Oh Danny Boy, oh Danny Boy, I love you so.

3. THE DREAM OF FINDING MY THEATRE TICKET

At the beginning of this dream, *I am looking at my hands*. Somewhere in my mind, like the fragment of a lost sermon, I remember a man's voice, low and authoritative, suggesting that I've lost my theatre ticket and won't be given a seat unless I can find it in time.

I have a memory flashback. I'm 5 years old. My father is passing out tickets to rides at Disneyland, instructing us, firmly, that hands (my sister's, two brothers' and framing a tightly focused emotional touching the tickets (a terrible anticipated failure). My father deals the circle. The flashback goes dark before I'm forced to take possession of mine.



we *must not lose them*. Four pairs of mine, the smallest) form a circle, vortex. I dread the responsibility of temptation already mocking my tickets to eager hands, rounding the

Did he ever actually give me the tickets?

This is a memory from Reality, a true moment in family history. But my recollection always stops before my fingers touch anything. I can't imagine me, a 5 year old, being trusted with my own tickets. Will Mother save the day and take them for me? Maybe Dad will put mine back in his pocket, seeing my concern. In my dream, my hands ache with an *echo of trepidation* and shame.

I look at my empty hands, still without a ticket. *I never know why they are empty.*

I'm looking at my dream hands when I become aware of an alternative pair, what-if parallel-me hands that exist only in Possibility. They overlap, just as ticketless, yet these new hands possess the power to move in just the right way (like a child performing "here's the church, here's the steeple...") to conjure, as it were, an open-door theatre waiting to be entered, ticket or no ticket. I move them in just the right away. A theatre appears around me, brick by brick, section by section.

I begin to ignore the memory suggesting that I still need a ticket. As the lights begin to dim, however, and it would be nice to know where I'm supposed to sit.

My free hands (my 'real' ones, not the parallel-me ones still conjuring) search my pockets, hunting for a ticket I may never have been given in the first place, hoping that, along with a surrounding theatre, one might have materialized, saving me any future hassles with conjured ushers.

Once the lights are all the way down and the show is about to begin, I realize I'm on the catwalk. The theatre must've materialized a tad too low. How am I going to find my way to my seat?

The wall at the back of the stage (behind black curtains, hidden from the audience) is ribbed with metal pipes and gently curving beams. In the dim blue backstage light, it resembles the inside of a whale. I love the details, the graceful organic patterns. I move along the catwalk, navigating narrow stairs that branch like bronchial tubes, ladders incased in metal rings. I make my way to the back wall.

Are the pipes that decorate the wall hot or cold? What are they made of? What do they do? I test one. It snaps off in my hand. A crystalline ping reverberates in the deadened space. There is a moment when I fear steam will pour out of the broken piping, burn my hands. (I'm afraid of hurting my hands, they are so childishly soft). An alarm might go off - (the stage is now brightly lit, the play is proceeding) - and I'll be blamed, sabotaging the play. Melodramatic headlines will ruin my career. Or worse, a burley stagehand will appear and toss me out, ticketless. I'll be unable to get back in.

But there is no steam; nothing circulating through the pipes. Only stillness behind the drawn curtains.

I sigh. *The perspective shifts:*

I'm in the wings, on the edge of shadow, just able to see a portion of the proscenium. Golden lights spill across the tips of two-toned wingtips. (Florsheims? Are these really my feet?) A subway rattles underneath the building. I wish I could drop through the floor and enter it, like Patrick Swayze in GHOST, an ineffectual spirit in a purgatory of perpetual commuters. Someone in the audience coughs. I notice that the actors are no longer saying anything.

The director of the play is standing in front of me, partially blocking my view. The actors drift, killing time, waiting for something, for one of them to remember what to say so they can get back on script. The director is doing nothing to fix things, which irks me (although not as much as you might think). He turns and looks at my empty hands, concern and expectation forming deep furrows on his face and dramatically coifed hair.

This is when I realize I am the author of the play being performed. I also realize I haven't yet completed the script, that the actors and director have never rehearsed beyond this point in the show (even though it is obviously a full performance, not a mere rehearsal). I'm impressed by the patience of the audience as they wait for the actors to reclaim the thread of the story. The performance hasn't yet unravelled to the point of no return.

Without any panic, I raise the piece of broken metal pipe (from the back wall) to my lips. I prompt the actors, speaking lines through this elongated megaphone, directly into the director's ear. The actors respond without delay, at the speed of thought. (The director's thoughts can manipulate them like so many puppets.)

The show goes on.

I've completed the script in my head but haven't typed it out yet. I wonder to myself, *Why had everyone been so worried during rehearsals? It's working splendidly.*

Self-satisfied, I smile. *My perspective shifts:*

I am now watching myself speak the lines. But since I'm speaking them through the metal pipe, I can't actually hear what I'm saying. The actors begin evolving the story into unintended territory, saying lines I haven't yet thought of. The plot is becoming unrecognizable. Pinocchio loose in the workshop.



[This is a good time to mention a few important Real Life contexts: As a writer, I've developed a sizable area in my "mindspace" in which I work out story lines, characters, narrative problems, etc. When I'm uncertain what should happen next in the story I'm working on, I often lay down, close my eyes and recreate, in as much detail as possible, the story up to that point, complete with dialogue, costumes, props and lighting. My mindspace often takes the form of an actual theatre, with my mind's eye seated somewhere in the front balcony (yet able to float around to any perspective, as well as inhabit characters on stage or see through the eyes of audience members). As I approach sleep (and here is where the magic is supposed to take over), characters and setting evolve a life of their own. Whole new story lines develop, specific and useful passages are unearthed. I'm almost always able to discover the way forward in this manner. (I can't recall ever having writer's block.) All I need is to endow my characters with enough autonomy and *voilà*.]

If the actors are merely puppets, what happens when the puppet-master can't think of what comes next?

I see myself talking through the pipe, but because I can't hear my own words, I think, *Maybe I'm telling them to act in this inane way...*

[Another important aside: This mindspace is a cherished aspect of my being. However, sometime toward the beginning of 1993, I lost control of it. Due to events in my life at the time*, whenever I closed my eyes to conjure up a stage or orchestra pit, terrible and disturbing images flooded in, a waking nightmare. I went on writing and composing, but without my beloved subconscious sanctuary, relying instead on knowledge and craftsmanship. To the outsider (everyone other than myself), there was no perceptible drop in my creative output. (Which surprised me at first, and then comforted me, enabling me to realize I was a better craftsman than I thought. These were very productive years.) But creating in this way was much less *fulfilling*. During that 4-5 year period, I no longer felt like “an artist.” I felt like I was creating out of simple momentum, not true inspiration. By 1996, I began to rediscover my mindspace. But it wasn’t until *this dream* that I fully trusted myself, trusted that nightmares would no longer intervene, haunt, derail, infect. After this dream, my mindspace became, again, a holy place.]

The dream shifts to the plush seats of the orchestra section:

Ornate reliefs decorate the proscenium arch, mostly classical in nature (beautiful Greek nudes, well-muscled Michelangelo men in repose, a few bearded writers holding feathered pens much too close to their noses). Luxurious reds and golds fill my peripheral vision. As I stand in about the 4th row (not sure which seat is mine or if I even have one), I notice there’s no audience. The cavernous auditorium is more or less empty (except for the actors on stage and the crew I know to be off-stage silently awaiting cues in the dim blue light). There are a few scattered onlookers. I’m able to stand without obstructing anyone’s view.

I turn my attention to the stage, having no reason to feel self-conscious (even though I’m still unable to sit). I want the best possible vantage point.

There are three thespians, all dressed in Victorian era costumes (actually, one is wearing a combination of torn clothing and bandages), performing a dramatic scene from my latest rewrite of CREATURE. [The play that had been unraveling earlier is now lost to the ether.] Victor Frankenstein, young and handsome, maniacally dazzling, has just reattached Elisabeth’s head. A thin stripe of red still encircles her neck, gently dripping down her corpse-white skin and blue-tinged breasts. The Creature is near the corner of the lab, upstage left, near the controls of an imposing apparatus (a mechanical character in and of itself, complex and dormant). They’re just about to bring Elisabeth back to life.

The Creature had murdered her in an earlier scene, accidentally breaking her neck when she refused to help him escape. She’d clumsily pointed Victor’s rifle at his chest, with



*“When dreams die in the hands of mercy”
- Of Mice and Men*

*I will not be relating these “events in my life,” however. I don’t want to relive them even through parenthetical narrative. Sorry.

no intention of pulling the trigger unless the Creature approached. The Creature had misinterpreted her action, thinking she would shoot him, regardless. Breaking her neck had been an understandable self-defensive act; plus, he didn't know his own strength - like Lenny in *OF MICE AND MEN*. Tearing her head off and throwing it across the stage, howling, was more a reaction to earlier accumulated betrayals than to Elisabeth herself. (Who among us has known more rejection than Frankenstein's Creature?)

When Victor enters the lab and finds his betrothed beheaded, precious blood all over precious instruments, you might think that he, too, will raise the rifle at his creature's chest. But Victor is too weak to act, too weakened by the mounting losses, the tearing asunder of hope, the hollowing of all ambition. It falls to the Creature to prop him up and inspire him, to help him regain his wit and energy (a poignant roll reversal) so that Elisabeth might be saved. There is no time for self-pity or retaliation. If Victor can construct the Creature from scratch (or, more accurately, from dozens of separate used body parts), surely he can put Elisabeth back together, since it is merely her *own* recently-removed-and-optimally-fresh head that needs reattaching to her still warm body.

Hard-driving rock guitars accompany the condensed miracle. Victor (reinvigorated by his creature's impassioned plea, his own sense of irony, his renown heroic charisma) feverishly works his genius hands as the Creature paces and moans (a prisoner of his own oversized limitations).

It's at this moment that, in my dream, I turn to face the action on stage, full of pride. Compelling sparks pour off the stage. I hear them sing my lyrics, adding a few new and better phrases I can't quite place into memory. It's a glorious moment.

I discover that I have to keep my eyes riveted to the stage. If my attention falters, the show devolves into *JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR* or, more irksome still, *THE MIKADO*. Yet I can't stare *too* intently or else the actors look my way and forget their lines. I, too, have to act, walking a tightrope of careful focus.

At first this isn't hard, since I'm enthralled, naturally. The two men, creator and created working side by side, bring their shared love back to life. The only problem is that Elisabeth believes that reanimating human beings is an abomination. She's never approved of Victor's secret obsession: Reanimating the dead. So, upon reawakening, upon coming back from the dead *herself*, upon seeing her reflection in Victor's mighty stainless steel apparatus, she sees herself as no longer human, as outside God's Nature. An abomination. She throws back her head, trying desperately to recall how to wail. (Certain nerve endings take longer to reconnect than others.) The moment is reminiscent of the famous vocalizing scene in *THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN* (intentionally). Everyone is horrified: a triangle of mangled expectations, strangers to each other as well as themselves; a tragic moment worthy of myth.

As I watch, I think maybe I can write it better.

My mind wanders.

[In a previous version (before the current director required changes), Elisabeth was eclectic, alluring, self-possessed, fearless, a rockstar groupie vixen who *drove* Victor to complete his vision. (The current Elisabeth ignores his work, like an uncertain spouse looking the other

way when all signs point to infidelity, then later attempts to derail him with her own fears, moral indignation and petulant incomprehensions). My previous (and favorite) Elisabeth saw Victor as an artist, a sculptor of flesh, the New Prometheus capable of snatching the flames of Hell from the gods... as well as finding the cure for unwanted signs of aging. (*Frankenstein: the ultimate plastic surgeon*, might have been the title, if it would've been made for TV.) Victor was the High Priest of the Fountain of Youth, the Defeater of Death, the founder of a new religion of Immortal Beauty, the inventor of Humanity 2.0. Upon looking into a mirror, the former Elisabeth might have requested a few more nips and tucks and breast enhancements, but would have been otherwise favorably impressed at her newly reanimated self. The Queen of Rebirth. The Diva of Vindication. An Iconoclastic Ingénue of Infinite Promise. A chance for a Show-Stopping Dance Number in punk clothing.

But that was the old Elisabeth. I had to keep this new version closer to Mary Shelley's book. What I need to do is to reintegrate the old Elisabeth, the sexy prophetess of the future, with this highly dramatic reanimation/confrontation/creator-creature moment. Rewrite the entire show... for the sixth time.]

When I come back from my reverie, the latest version of Elisabeth is still staggering around the stage, trying to come to grips with the obscenity she's become. The Creature staggers toward her. Two peas in a pod.

For the first time since he opened his eyes, the Creature sees *hope*. ("Soullessmates," the actor's probably thinking, but the Creature wouldn't know that word yet.)

Elisabeth looks back toward Victor. He lets himself feel hope, too, or, more importantly, *redemption*.

Both men are suspended in their tragic anticipations. Elisabeth turns back and forth, from one to the other. They expect her to choose between them. Once chosen, their life will be purified.

"Whose to say she's going to want either of them," someone says from the front row, someone I hadn't noticed. When she turns toward me, I recognize her as *the bear* from a previous dream, even though she is now a smaller black bear (instead of the Great Cave Bear that looked more like a grizzly).

"Everyone wants her to choose between these two men," she continues, moving her paws with delicate gestures, a tea party sort of bear. "But both men are monsters. Both have betrayed her."

As she speaks, I wonder if my lost ticket is for the empty seat next to her. The thought disturbs me a bit.

"She wants them both," says another voice, a tear-stained *ingénue* sitting slightly behind me, "the monster *and* the artist."

Just then, the rasping sound of an electrocution shakes the rafters. Elisabeth has walked past the Creature and impaled herself on one of Victor's electrodes, a fantastic film noir set piece you knew had to figure prominently sooner or later. She fries herself beyond salvation.

The bear is right.

The Creature destroys the lab in retaliation. Peter Townsend on steroids.

Victor slumps onto the stage, his life and every metaphor of his life in ruins. The rifle lies disturbingly close to his limp, impotent hand.

The ingénue starts crying again.

Standing so close to the stage action, which has become personally symbolic, seems like an invasion of privacy, even though I'm the author. My sense of claustrophobia sends me to the balcony. I'm now looking down on the orchestra seats, the stage, the bent and exhausted actors, the two audience members. Perhaps my ticket was for the seat next to the ingénue. She does so need consoling. I wish all my audiences were as engaged and emotional.

Another female voice penetrates.

"You need no one but yourself."

On the edge of the shadows, as if illuminated by moonlight, only a portion of her face is visible, her golden hair, her less golden skin. She leans forward from the box seats. I strain to see, to recognize.

My sister.

"Toni!" I want to reply.

(It's at this moment that I know I'm dreaming. I know Toni is dead. I know she is only able to visit me this way.) I keep myself from speaking her name, fearing she'll disappear. [Merely writing the word "Toni" takes an extra push, a disconcerting effort, even though I'm not dreaming as I write this, only recalling a dream.]

"You don't need an audience," she says simply.

I smile, knowing it's not true. I appreciate her faith in me, her belief in my courage and creativity.

I think how I haven't missed her lately, not since the ingénue in the 7th row caught my eye, not since those tears fell because of something I wrote, something I brought to the stage from somewhere deep inside. But I can't say that out loud.

I wait for her to speak.

She is my only god. She is too precious to question.

"You think you need to sit next to someone," Toni says, not as if she's reading my mind, more like she's telling me something on her deathbed, as when she told me to learn how to play piano, to learn Joni Mitchell's "River" so I could play it by next Christmas, and not just play it, but understand it; and how she wished she had a river she could skate away on.

Her voice is unhurried. I fear each word will be her last. In her tone I hear the subtext. I realized she will never do anything more than sit, ever again.

And then she looks at me without blinking, without needing to, and I hear all the songs I could ever write in her eyes, they are so limitless.

"Remember when I gave you my embroidered baseball cap, that last Thursday in the ICU? The blue one with purple stitching? I wanted Kristie Edwards to have it. Poor Kristie. I gave it to you, right off my head. It was hers."

Yes, I remember.

[When I finally tracked Kristie down (completely by accident) on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, I had the hat in my backpack. (I never knew when I might run into her). We staggered, shell-shocked, a good four months after Toni's death. We hugged like lovers. And cried, as time stood still and students streamed around us not noticing. "You didn't come to the funeral," I mentioned, wanting to know why, to tell her about it. When the depth of her sorrow unleashed, I felt more than foolish for asking. *She was your best friend, Toni. I barely knew her; I was just your little brother. Yet, somehow, as the repository of all your dreams, I felt like I knew her better than she knew herself. Poor lost Kristie. And now I'm hurting her by failing to understand.*

"I'm sorry I never returned your calls," she choked out between sobs.

"I wanted to give you something, from Toni."
I pulled out the hat. It wouldn't make anything better, but I had to fulfill the promise.

"I can't take it," she said, something changing in her demeanor.

I looked down at the hat, not wanting to withdraw it. "It's yours."

She shook her head "No" but took the hat, holding it a bit too far from her center, as if to say it could never be hers again. And then she looked at me as if seeing a ghost.

"My god, you have her eyes. They're so blue...!"

Rimmed in red and magnified by tears, I'm sure they looked bluer than usual.

"I can't look at them." She abruptly turned and walked away.

I never saw her again.*

I doubt Kristie ever wore the hat. I imagined her tossing it into the first dumpster she encountered, never looking back.]

"She never looked back," Toni says, implying that she'd witnessed the scene in Madison. "I didn't think she'd wear the hat again. But I wanted you to give it to her, to see her. For me. To be my eyes."

At that instant, we saw the same things.

"You, on the other hand, you can't let go of anything. I love you for that, kid," (she always called me kid). *"I'm glad I had both of you in my life."*



* After posting the first draft of this chapter on the Internet, I was contacted by a mutual friend who knew Kristie's whereabouts. I emailed her. We exchanged photos. I gave her the link to this file. She wanted to get together to discuss it, to search her memory, to share reasons. As it turns out, Kristie didn't come to Toni's funeral because she wasn't told. She was atop a mountain on a summer long Outward Bound excursion. Her parents never sent word. They didn't want to interrupt what they hoped would be a saving experience for their troubled daughter. While she was up there, they moved to another state, so when she came down, she didn't return to Wisconsin. Not for months.

Kristie and I met for lunch, 32 years after transferring the hat, after Toni's funeral. Still searching for resolution. I asked what she did for a living. "Oh, this and that," she replied, "I was a hospice worker for years." I took her to Dad's house and she came away with several photos and scraps from Toni's journal. She was able to visit my father just before he died, forgiving him for sins he would no longer be able to remember. I cherish Kristie in ways I will ever know how to express, in ways so lost in healing they need a new kind of math to comprehend. We are walking wounds, each for the other, I suspect.

I look at her too intently. She starts to fade.

“You never let go of anything.” She’s half transparent. *“Not even those tickets. You wouldn’t give them to anyone, not even the ticket takers, you held on so intensely. We had a devil of a time trying to get you on those rides at Disneyland.”*

I think I hear her giggle, remembering.

And then she’s gone.

I am unable to hold her.

Just then, I notice hundreds of tickets. Right there, in my hands.

I bet there’s one for every seat in the entire theatre.

