

A Journal of the Plague Year by James R. Hugunin

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"I drag behind me the burden of my recent widowhood. Do I have the will to navigate dark, turbulent waters as a newly single person?" — Picky Hunting.

Jorge Luis Borges married a second wife at eighty-six. — David Markson

A great many people are interested in the question: Who will attain Eugénie Grandet's hand?"

— "Eugénie Grandet," Donald Barthelme's riff on Balzac in *Sixty Stories* (1981)

Imaginative hunting involves finding one's way into one's prey's heart and then twisting it all up. — How to Read (2014) Eckhard Gerdes

DEDICATION

To all who fight racism and rising fascism.



Donald Trump (archaic 2-fisted bruiser loser), 2016:

"In addition to winning the Electoral College in a landslide, I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally."

Steve McCaffery (Canadian scholar and poet):

"When spin room jockeying becomes the approved praxis of powerful institutions, fiction itself becomes a 'matter' of *fact*."... Put another way; fiction is now being deployed as a tool, even a weapon, for real world ends."

USAF Colonel (ret) Curtis Milam:

"Everything wrong with America is manifested in Trump. The hunger for power, the vile derision of people who don't look like you, the cruelty, the privilege, the gleeful ignorance, and mendacious narcissism. Our revulsion at Trump is causing Americans to ask: How did we get to this place? And how do we get out? That will take time and hard work by well-intentioned people from every corner of American society. But the process has started. What is happening in our streets is how open, progressive societies improve — fitfully, imperfectly, frustratingly, sometimes tragically. But we do improve. So, thank you, President Trump. Thank you for showing us what we were becoming and helping us find the courage to confront it. We are going to be OK."

NEO-LIBERALISM

"CAPITALIST REALISM" (MARK FISHER'S TERM)

Beginning with the presidency of Jimmy Carter, a succession of Democratic presidents joined Republicans in turning away from the New Deal model of regulated capitalism toward what has come to be known as neoliberalism. The neoliberal credo claims that markets work efficiently and that government attempts to constrain them via regulation and public spending invariably fail, backfire, or are corrupted by politics. As public policy, neoliberalism has relied on deregulation, privatization, weakened trade unions, less progressive taxation, and new trade rules to reduce the capacity of national governments to manage capitalism. These shifts have resulted in widening inequality, diminished economic security, and reduced confidence in the ability of government to aid its citizens.

neoliberalism. As government became a less dependable source of economic security, people were made to feel that they were on their own, thus internalizing an individualist rather than collectivist view of citizen and society.

The difference between the New Deal or social-democratic view of markets and the neoliberal ideal is that progressives want the government's rules to act as democratic counterweights to the abuses of capitalism, while neoliberals want them to protect market freedoms. But both accept that capitalism requires rules.

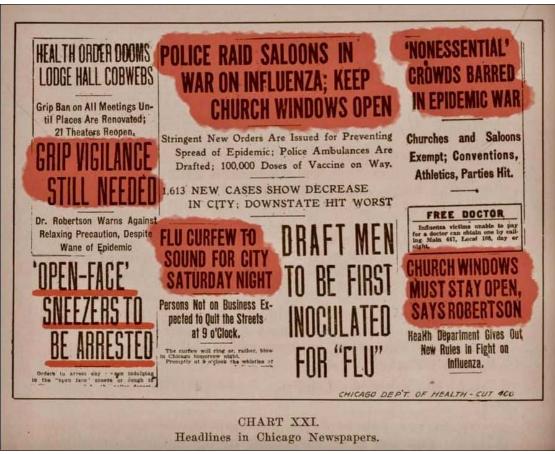
"Free Markets, Besieged Citizens," Robert Kuttner, *The New York Review of Books* (July 21, 2022): 12 - 13.



Mankind which began in a cave and behind a windbreak will end in the disease-soaked ruins of a slum. -H. G. Wells



"Instead of thought, there is a vast, inhuman void full of words, formulas, slogans, declarations, echoes - ideologies!" (Thomas Merton).



Headlines in Chicago newspapers during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic.

Waves of the dead are arriving on the shores of the River Styx. Charon, the Ferryman of the Dead, is more like an Uber driver than a salaried employee these days. His labor is with us when we TV-see screaming ambulances, mobile refrigerated morgues, and the Good Ship Mercy docking in L.A. harbor.

- Picky Hunting

I want to emphasize that this is a serious health situation in China, but I want to emphasize that the risk to the American public currently is low. — CDC Director Robert Redfield (coronavirus task force briefing)

We are seeing an uptick in cases — higher than they've ever been. Many, many states that had been doing reasonably well are now showing upticks, that's what we should be concentrating on

- Dr. Anthony Fauci

People are tired of hearing Fauci and all these idiots, these people that have gotten it wrong.

- Donald Trump

PREFACE

by Picky Hunting

"Take off that foolish hat. Put down the chair." — What I said to my husband, Noonie, when taking what turned out to be his last portrait.



Drone photograph of Picky Hunting's backyard in Oak Park, IL by Al Wayne.

I am Picky. You can be, too. Can you pick me out in the above drone shot of my backyard in Oak Park, Illinois? Check one:

Picky is next to the bald man. ____ Picky is on the far left.

 What do you think of these questions?

 Picky is manipulating me.

Picky is just being snarky.

I am just having fun here. But on a deeper level, I am showing my ambivalence concerning leaving my award-winning garden to start a new life in another state, having to seek new companionship, all after recently being widowed, worn thin by months of yearning for things to somehow right themselves concerning my hubby's mysterious demise. The evening I learned to his awful death, I slept in my closet, hunched into a ball on the floor. My cousin insisted I see a Buddhist therapist. Reluctantly I go. Next thing, I'm holding a blue rope, an older man with bright green eyes holding the other end. Lessons about *tension*. "Tension is a normal part of life." *Yah*, I think, *my first husband made sure of that!* He pulls the rope and says, "See, feel it? You can handle that, right? I am not sure. *From where I'm standing actually sitting* — *I think I need to escape to new digs; find a new place to find myself again*.

I struggling with my self-image (like Parmigianino in his *SelfPortrait in a Convex Mirror*) now that my "mirror" for 20 years can't reflect back to me his observations. Is that



This would be a first date "killer" for me.



Scene from The Good Liar (2019).

why you can't see me very well in the above shot? Why I chose that shot? Moreover, was I trying to see if you can pick out my dead husband, Noonie, —"Nothing to do but lie here and come apart" (my diary entry day 2 after his death) — so as to lure him back across The Great Divide and into my life again? Hi-tech drone sympathetic magic? Crazy, of course.

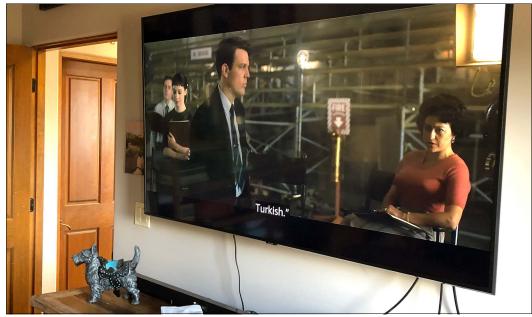
But not as crazy as having to find, to pick, another man to share my remainder of life with. I couldn't establish rapport with anyone who'd not seen *The Godfather*. Scary, too. I recently watched (very nervously) *The Good Liar* on my large-screen TV. Had Estelle's (Helen Miren) online profile been less appealing, Brian (Ian McKellen), trolling for class and wealth, might never have tried to scam her. Is there a lesson to be learned here? Maybe. Maybe later, if there *is* a later for me during the Reign of COVID XIX.

* *

Technologically, I single out the development of electronics among the most significant developments of the twentieth century; in terms of ideas, the change from a relatively rational and scientific view of things to a nonrational and less scientific one.

- Raymond Firth (British anthropologist)

Electronics play a major role in my text; a dream of me-present-to-me, me-to-you. Much information finding its way into this book, written during the coronavirus lockdown, is gleaned from television, the Internet, phone calls/messages. In the past, diaries consisted of a record of a person's daily activities, personal conversations, and correspondence. Prior to the Web and e-mail, phone calls were the only electronic intervention between people.



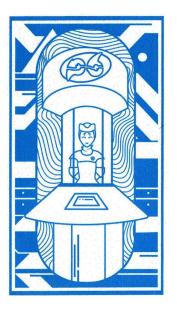
Picky's large-screen TV.

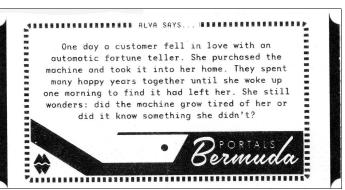
Locked down in my new abode, lacking face-to-face contact, I have little choice but to extend my electronic "feelers" outward into the realm of *information*. A hunter-gatherer in line with Ursula Le Guin's "carrier bag theory" (the receptacle, not the weapon, was the 1st tool of survival). But I realize *that* information has been filtered before gets in my bag, filtered and then passed to you. And like hunter-gatherers, I've mastered the art of making chance happen by always being open, always alert.

Bertrand Russell wrote about 2 types of knowledge: 1) knowledge by acquaintance; and 2) knowledge by description. The "knowledge" you glean from my book will be a 3rd type, knowledge by description described. What will be described includes Firth's observation about our times being less scientific, less rational. To this, I would add: 1) the rise of absolute asocial individualism in official and popular ideologies; 2) emigration, forced or chosen, which dismantles one's center of the world, turns it to fragments, requiring drawing new maps; 3) the diminishing rights of women in this country; 4) maniacal monoculturalism; 5) increasing violence. These themes interweave through my description of my new life New Mexico's vital history and culture, its magnificent landscape.

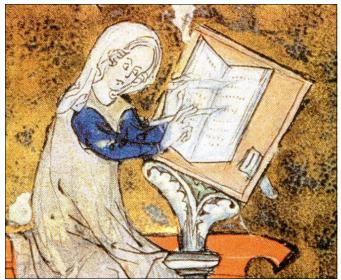
Thank you for *picking* out this book. Thank you taking the time to participate in this Preface during a time when time's apparent easy flow of the every day has been repeatedly jarred due to natural and man-made disasters, traumatic political events. You may now enter a scripto-visual text "curated" by a widowed NeverTrumper whose self-image increasingly appears to match that of Brueghel's painted figure of 1563, "Mad Meg".

* * *





Recto / verso of a fortune-telling machine card dispensed to Picky when she was a child visitor to Chicago's famous Riverview Park (now defunct).



Early English woman writer, Marie de France, from an early illuminated manuscript (c. 1290).

And so I wrote in my diaries to appease my fear of life disappearing, my fear of losing the stunning, grotesque ceaseless mixture of all of it. — Lisa Robertson's female protagonist in The Baudelaire Fractal

It seems to me surely shameful that my human voice should, in mute tenacity and with sealed lips, keep silent about these things I deem worthy to reveal. Let me, in fragments, reveal.

- Picky Hunting

'Lonely discourse' reveals more about social tendencies than does communicative discourse.

- Theodor W. Adorno

PESTIS WHO? *To the Editors:*

Please forgive the extreme delay of this letter in response to Claire Nett's upbeat review of Yersinia Pestis' book which mentions my late husband's suspicious death and claims I had the fragments for his final book, *Mememo*, edited by a friend and then bound in skin taken from my husband's back prior to cremation ["A 'Killer' of an Academic Killed, Departmental Politics As Usual," *Academic Review*, June 20, 2018]. After my husband's death, I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico; my husband's soon-to-expire subscription to your magazine took awhile to arrive at my new address. To the whole business I can only say that my late husband and I barely knew Ms. Pestis. Yet she quotes my husband's *supposed* description (in Latin) of his despised departmental chairman as an ungulate: "Longo dorso et brevis cruribus, magnis cornibus (long back, short legs and large horns).

I initially met Pestis by sheer accident at O'Hare airport's Starbucks in 2007, she and I returning from our respective vacations in Maine — funny, we both had lunch at The Clam Shack in Kennebunkport on different days — and that was our topic for perhaps 20 minutes; soon we discovered our respective professions were similar, too: *she*, a "self-help" pop psychologist/author living in "Mad City," Wisconsin, *me* a Ph.D. psychoanalyst in private practice in the "Windy City". The next day, my husband and I ran into her at the charming Buzz Cafe in Oak Park. Seems she was staying at The Write Inn while attending a conference nearby at the Ernest Hemingway Museum on "Suicide and Realism: Just a Coincidence?" Our chat, on academic "Troll Masters", lasted perhaps 40 minutes.

In the summer of 2010, my adjunct faculty husband and I ran into her in a Laotian restaurant on famed "Willy" street in Madison, Wisconsin (she had a part-time teaching gig at UW). We had driven up from Oak Park to visit old friends. This chance meeting made so scant an impression on me that I forget its exact duration. Over the next decade, my husband and I had only sporadic interaction with Ms. Pestis. She remained on our holiday greeting card list and she and I (and maybe my husband, too) exchanged perhaps a dozen or so short *Hello*-style e-mail messages and telephone calls. As far as I can recall, all communication with her ceased in 2014. In 2018, she paid me an unannounced visit at my Chicago Loop office. Not having seen her for some 4 years, I'd forgotten all about her and had to ask her name. Our conversation largely concerned my academic husband's woes as "contingent faculty", his suspicious death by falling. She said she was researching a book on PTFSD:

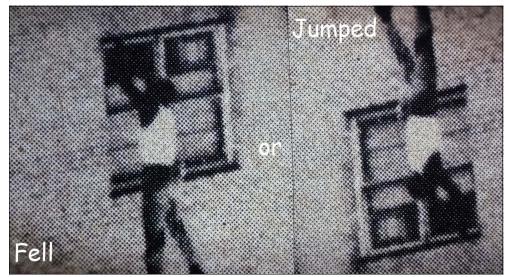


From Noonie's morbid "Jump Shots" collection shot off TV (2017). On verso is written: "I am now on a dark path, a future filled with big data and small comprehension."

"Part-time faculty stress disorder due to academic neo-liberal business models: precarity suffered while having to write pompous abstruse, inflated, obscure, jargon-ridden essays, negotiate paternalism and moralistic identity politics shorn of radical goals (class, desire), giving 'Trolls' the satisfaction of smiting the devil." She told me she was exploring the use of Scientology's "Touch Assist" technique in treating it. Moreover, she found that some faculty across the country, like my husband, had died under suspicious circumstances. I may have opened up to her about certain details of my husband's struggles in academia. But not much. I did mention his own mortality supplied the only perspective in which he could trust.

In my lifetime, including our previous interactions, Pestis and I have spoken a grand total of perhaps 15 hours at the very most. (I can't vouch for my late husband here, though.) Most of our discussions evaded matters of importance, or so I recall. How she could turn this rather limited interaction into a full-length book about me and my late husband's academic woes in the business model of faculty micro-management, academic thought-police ("Trolls"), and unequal salaries remains utterly beyond my grasp.

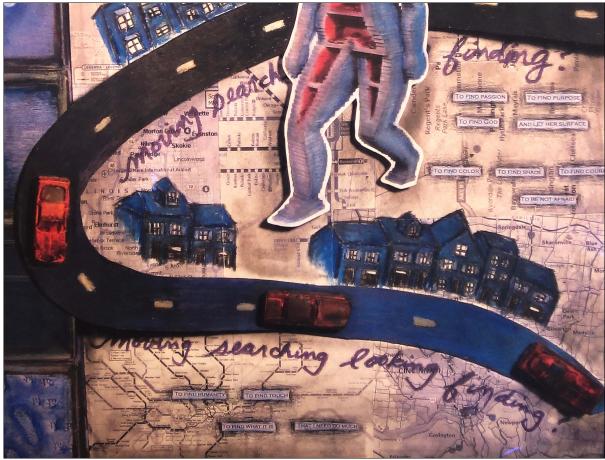
I've not read much of the book. Her reasons for wanting retroactively to insert herself so deeply into our lives (especially my dead husband's), calling herself a "close friend," seem either *purely commercially motivated* — this was soon after director Errol Morris came out with his 2017 Netflix film series *Wormwood*, concerning biochemist Frank



Errol Morris' Wormwood. Unbearable uncertainly of my husband's demise: accident, suicide, or murder?

Olson's mysterious "suicide" by nose diving out the window at the Statler Hotel, NYC in 1953 — or else it speaks to a deeper pathology of Pestis' on which I have the expertise to comment, but the lack of interest to do so. As for my husband's mysterious death — flash-back of such flaring in my gloom — our PI friend, Dallas, is investigating new leads. I can only take some hope from French artist Ossip Zadkine's bold comment: "Remember, when a man falls over a cliff, he almost certainly smiles before he hits the ground, because that's what his own demon tells him to do."

Picky Hunting, Santa Fe, New Mexico



Picky's Quest: A Vision Board.

We have room to frolic, to bound in our bounded precincts. We look through the bars to see other animals enmeshed in their own cages. — Michael Martone

It will become clear that every epoch has the epidemic it deserves. — Karl Krauss

The path to the End Began at his start To Find her first calm Her long broken heart she sits in the Plaza With secrets from her Knight Is it adventure that keeps Him out of her sight?

INTRODUCTION

Women, when they are old enough to have done with the business of being women, and can let loose their strength, must be the most powerful creatures in the world. — Isak Dinesen

United Express flight 627 is on final approach into Santa Fe Regional Airport. High over high dessert. My husband once told me the 1st aerial photo of Albuquerque was made in 1913. In my bag are 2 books: Tommy Orange's *There There* and Hieu Minh Nguyen's *Not Here*, which I alternate read. It is July 14, 2019, Bastille Day in France which celebrates the beginning of the end of such kingly attitudes as *L'état*, *c'est moi* ("I myself am the nation), which Donald Trump, The Immanent Baboon, is reviving.

I am in seat number 15C, aisle seat next to me vacant. I've been listening to classical music on the airplane's audio feature, staring out the window at rocks, shrubby junipers, aspen, sprouting from high desert sands (coarse as little organic material deteriorates to form a rich soil as I had in my award-winning Oak Park, Illinois garden) we descend. I recall my late husband's comical imitation of a flight attendant's plea: *We shall shortly be arriving in mayhem; if there is anybody on board who can impersonate a pilot, it would be of comfort to the other passengers.* I tune to the cockpit radio audio option and hear: . . . automated weather observation 1-4-1-5 ZULU. Wind 220 at 18. Visibility 15. Sky condition clear. Temperature is 23. Dewpoint is 33. Altimeter 2-0-0-5. Remarks: Density altitude 8200. Runway in use is two zero. Contact ground at 121.7 with information Bravo.

I am flying into Santa Fe, New Mexico, originally the site of an Indian pueblo known as *Oghà P'o'oge* in the Tewa language, taken over by the Spanish in 1610 and named La Villa Real de la Santa Fe de San Francisco de Asís (the Royal Town of the Holy Faith of Saint Francis of Assisi), shortened to Santa Fe. I am to meet Gary, my realtor, and go see the house I hope to buy. But will this be a new future, or just an "upgrade"?



Been perusing this possible new home online via Zillow for days, literally pawing at the screen like a dog. It is sited midway up a gentle hill on Avenida Frijoles in the planned community of Aldea. If it meets my picky expectations, I will make an offer, see if the sellers accept. If they do, I fly home, pack up

the dogs and wheel "Lexstacy", my Lexus SUV across country. Can hard believe that journey was accomplished in covered wagons prior to the railroads and Fred Harvey's innovative hotels (like Santa Fe's La Fonda).

Wheels touch ground with a BUMP, thrust reverser G-force (I hate landings). A short taxi to the gate; it's a small airport. Bags are handed off. Gary, wearing beige slacks, Birkenstocks, and a golf shirt, escorts me to his white SUV. Our day commences. It's still



Spanish church ruins, Pecos National Park.

early enough for the dry air to feel brisk to me. A passionate gardener, I am on new turf, a transplant from the Midwest. Will I grow in this new soil? I know I will be pleased that stones stay warm long after sunset here.

Gary and I chat very excitedly about the house — my forever-home? all the way to a superb Mexican eatery, Los Potrillos. Gary opts for their *huevos*

nopalitos, I order *huevos rancheros*. With the taste of the Southwest on our tongues conversation spices up, ranging from Bandelier National Monument with its petroglyphs, to Taos with its small museums and famous Pueblo, mountains, rocks, deep ravines, to an old Spanish church and Pueblo ruins in Pecos National Historical Park, to blackened areas recently licked by flame from lightning strikes into water-starved brush, to when allergy season starts and how to tame it, to the fabulous Indian markets staged about the area.

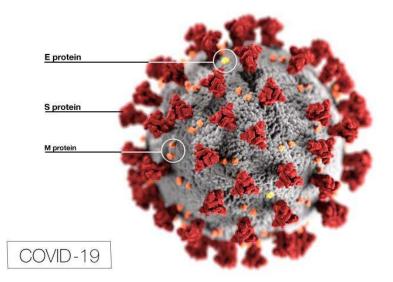
According to Archbishop Ussher, in 1645, the universe was created on 10/26/4004 B.C. at 9 a.m. My universe collapsed on 9/8/2017 at 7 p.m. when my husband died. From the gentleness Gary treats me, I see he knows, despite my enthusiasm, I still mourn my hubby. He realizes how scary, this move from my Illinois comfort zone is. But I am brave, like those educated "bad girls" (not to forget Georgia O'Keefe) fleeing the East with its suf*fuck*cating patriarchy. To find, like them, my own adventures, my deeper self, by moving to this vast land.

Been reading about these bold women in Leslie Poling-Kempes' *Ladies of the Canyons: A League of Extraordinary Women and Their Adventures in the American Southwest.* Back when men were cactuses and women were *women*, and the cactuses were trying to prick the women and the women were constantly thinking it over but finally deciding it wouldn't be a good idea.

Long story, short. My offer on that Pueblo-Revival style home is accepted. My new *castle hath a pleasant seat; the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto my gentle senses* (riffing on Duncan in *Macbeth*). A month later, I return with my dogs. At 1st every room is full of all the things that aren't there. But 6 months thereafter, my new furniture and southwest decor fill my abode. Then the Reign of COVID XIX arrives. Over his Kingdom of Anxiety His Evil Majesty begins transforming global life dramatically.

This initial journal of the plague year, with its dialectical relationship between image and text, begins with the coronavirus lockdown in New Mexico in February 2020, ends with 2020 Election. Throughout, I've been thinking about character and landscape as dependent as I record my impressions, gather historical data, note the responses of people I am in contact with, and adjudicate my conflicted feelings about finding a new lover during a time when intimate face-to-face contact is *streng verboten*.

* * *



For the [COVID-19] virus has become, in my view, a metapicture of imagemaking and image-thinking in our time, a figure of figuration itself. — W. J. T. Mitchell

The single human being, in the city apartment, thinks, I have never known such loneliness.

- Zadie Smith "Suffering Like Mel Gibson"

I start to be everywhere. I want to be everywhere. It is I who am starting this thing of the months, even years, to come.

- COVID XIX spoken upon his coronation



Picky Hunting's coronavirus mask.



Caterina de Julianis: Time and Death (before 1727, a diorama wax horror).

Bubonic plague, caused by the bacterium *yersinia pestis*, waned in Europe by the 18th century. Its last great ravages took place in Marseilles in 1720. This wax horror made by a nun in Naples shows how the memory persisted of an entire landscape ravaged by death. Like earlier works such as Hans Holbein's *Dance of Death* prints and Bruegel the Elder's *Triumph of Death*, this is a hideous vision of death as an anarchist, destroying all human hopes. It and the tradition it is part of can be traced to the Black Death itself. The memory of this pandemic has never been erased.

Death itself has come with its documentation/we're going to take up again / the struggle / again we're going to begin / again we're going to begin all of us / against the great defeat of the world . . .

— Juan Gelman, from Unthinkable Tenderness



"Unprecedented" chosen by Dictionary.com users as Word of the Year.

... in an age when the autobiography, as a form, has become little more than the pension-book of politicians and actors.

— Martin Amis (reviewing Anthony Burgess)

In a year when everything fuckin' thing has gone askew . . . I start my journal of the plague year. But, cut into the present, the future leaks out. — Picky Hunting

Communication and contact, a basic difference: communication is designed to avoid contact, to establish a distance between encoder and decoder; contact involves identification with the creature you contact — this can be painful.

- Vitalina (Picky's artist friend) re: Picky hunting a mate

The US is currently in the grip of two interlocking addictions — greed and anger. An alliance between greed-addicted rich people and anger-addicted not-rich people constitutes the Republican Party."

— Ian Frazier



A young Elon Musk dining with Jeff Bezos.

Modern Civilizations

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sults accrue regardless of the difference in the character of communities or the nature of their environments? Do they not show that under present like conventions the result, taken by and large, is the severance of the products of effort—wealth—from the producer, and their accumulation in the possession of the non-producing distributive element? Is it not made clear that, under present social arrangements, the actual doing of the world's work and the actual producing of the things constituting wealth tend to poverty and social impotence, while alert cunning, in manipulating the counters representing these accomplishments, leads to affluence, power, and social distinction—in brief, that present conventions favor Tricksy-Cunning and handicap Skillful-Strong?

William H. Smyth, Concerning Irascible Strong, et al (New York: A. Knopf, NY, 1926)

1.0



Our "peapod" rowboat, Maine. We named *Peapod* (close to *Pequod*).

I was born in 1944. A war baby. I am related to Trotsky's 2nd wife and Jimmy Hoffa's labor lawyer. My 1st husband was a labor lawyer. My mother (*née* Zingorenko) was Canadian. Her parents had immigrated to Canada from Russia, fleeing the pogroms. As if to counter such horrors, I was given the name Prili (Hebrew for Sociability, Affection, Intuition, Vitality). Prili Hartung my birth certificate reads. As it became obvious I had *very specific* tastes in food and, later, in clothing, make-up, and boys. I simply became "Picky" to everyone.

Attained degrees in English Lit (my thesis, *Honest Iago*, claimed that Desdemona *did* have an affair with Cassio in *Othello*), and Clinical Psychology from the University of Chicago. Legally changed my name to "Picky Hunting" — hey, if Issur Danielovitch can become Kirk Douglas. Not many Gentiles change their surname to a Jewish one! With marriage, I became Picky Hunting-Verlagen. Dropped my husband's name after our divorce (he was unfaithful).

When I met my 2^{nd} husband for a noon lunch date every molecule in the air reversed its charge. One reason I gave him the endearing nickname "Noonie". But also because when excited or frustrated — major traits of adjunct faculty, always late for the noon faculty meeting — he'd toss both arms upward like a clock's 2 hands reaching for NOON. Noonie, a bit bipolar ("Very happy — until further notice"), could get mildly depressed, then I'd call him "Captain Midnight", after a 1950s TV show sponsored by Ovaltine. He'd laugh and riposte: "Well, at least my clock is correct twice a day!" A sly reference to the sad fact my house clocks (it'd always be *my* house) often gave fake time due to neglect. We both love kids. I had 2. He didn't *because* he loved kids. Two peas in a pod, he and I. Like me and my Philly-based BFF, Melanie. BTW, we 3 went to the Barnes Museum for the Cézannes and the Surrealists before its sad demise and move into corporatized fakery.

Several times over the years Melanie and I went on a girls-only romp to Kennebunkport, Maine — *sans* Noonie, who'd binge watch "Law and Order" re-runs. We'd lunch at The Crab Shack, where we once spied George H.W. Bush order a lobster roll (didn't he know they are much better at Allison's), and then rent a "peapod" rowboat, slowly paddling out into the harbor where we'd exclaim, tossing our arms upward: "Two peas in a pod!" Indigenous to Maine, used by lobster fishermen originally, this unique boat is about 12 feet long, pointed on both ends, like a peapod, so it can be easily maneuvered back and forth. An exchange of directions, an I-Thou dialogic (ah, Martin Buber!) that nicely describes the back-and-forth, give-and-take necessary for good friendships and sustainable marriages.

The latter point is why I, a few years ago, was delighted to see such a rowboat (green no less!) added to the vessels for rent at our fishing lodge, Boyd's Mason Lake Resort



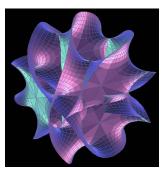
The Shaman in the resort's dining room.

near Park Falls, Wisconsin. Noonie and I had, for 20 years, driven up there during the Dog Days of August in search of giant muskie and walleye. I always out-fished Noonie, who merely managed to tangle his line and laugh about it. We were then as close as 2 facing pages in the local newspaper.

Once I wanted to paddle "Peapod II" out to Blackwood, an isle mysterioso on Long Lake where according to local legend mist hovers even on bright days and odd funnel-like hollows ruffle the dirt in which small, creepy areas of dried-blood red grass oozing drops of topaz-colored sweat irregularly sprout, especially around a petrified log dubbed "Dick" whose

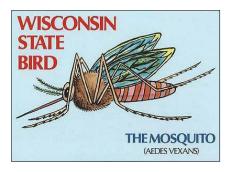
heart glows at night with the pulsing greens, crimsons, and blues of a fire opal. Even more ominously, it is said a cat and a beagle were found dead there once. A local Objibwe shaman we met at the lodge stopped at our table to tell us a chimera, a nightmare beast, part cat, part dog, haunts the isle. Said his People ironically referred to that cursed spot as *Gaumeenautikawayauk* (Place of Many Berries). Despite that pleasant name, it continues to have a bad reputation. Despite its many berries, no one picks them; no one dares camp overnight because as he put it: "No matter where you pitch your tent, it will lie on a threshold where opposing forces meet and so it's never a place of rest." Animals avoid it, dead fish are often found on its beaches, violent insects eviscerate berries and flowers alike, drinking their interior liquid. At night globes of light were seen floating among the trees; at dusk boaters would hear strange hissing sounds. Did we believe this? Noonie said, "Doubt is a better guide to where one wants to go than certitude, Picky."

Noonie thought all this "gloom 'n doom" merely an attempt to frighten teenagers from using it as a lake-borne lovers lane. I said it would more likely *encourage* the teens (he never had kids). This is not to say Noonie was adverse to the strange and dark (loved sci-fi and H.P. Lovecraft), or to Eastern thought (dug Lao-Tze, Jung and Schopenhauer). An



We live in a 4-D pocket in a multidimensional universe.

Aldous Huxley fan, he was snake-charmed by the notion of the Non-Thought of Thoughts, Zen, fascinated by the "queerness" of quantum and string theories in physics which he hoped would provide access to The One. The dialogue of the mind with itself had begun. He re-read *The Tao of Physics* every year on February 20th — why that date? don't ask me — that poor paperback suffered a surfeit of red underlining, marginal notes, and overly-thumbed pages. He imagined a multiverse, time-travel, sought a fundamental ground of Being. The last book he ordered from Amazon was *The Fabric of the Cosmos*.



But he also had, like Ludwig Wittgenstein, a deep interest in language, "Language we not only use, but swim in like the fish in Dog Lake, Picky."

More inclined to all things romantic, I hate sci-fi, I insisted we skip the isle of doom and do a sunset paddle around Dog Lake after our countrystyle meal in the homey cedar walled dining area of the main lodge, performing the "Two Peas-in-a-Pod" ceremony as the sun set, filling the sky with riots of

red flame. I thought *the best sunset ever*, but now, in New Mexico, realize it was, in comparison, small potatoes. The fact that we had dogs — a scottie and a westie, like on the Black and White Scotch label — made the choice of that lake obvious, despite having to fight northern Wisconsin's monstrous, blood-hungry mosquitoes.



Wash your hands! Mural, Santa Fe.

I *am* very picky. I take 2 hours at my toilet in the mornings. During the reign of COVID XIX, I wash my hands every 2 hours. I am picky about my politics, about what kind of dogs I have, what kind of house I live in with those dogs, what stores I shop in, what flower goes with what flower in what vase, what flower to place near what shrub, what garden ornament to place next to what gnome (I'm a creative gardener), what knick knack goes next to what on the mantel, what seats we order for the opera, what restaurant we



My friend Melanie just sent me this news shot of a Philadelphia man being wrestled off a bus for not wearing a face mask during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another black man was arrested for wearing one.

dine at prior to the opera, what blouse goes with what skirt, what hat with what jacket, what shoes with what pants, what painting to hang near what print, what print to hang next to what decorative mask, what smaller rug to toss over a larger rug in a room, what wine to pair with what entrée (albeit, Noonie was good at this, too), what vegetable to serve with what meat/fish, what soap to use with what dish soap, when to follow soap with a good dose of bleach, and what style and color face mask goes with what light jacket when I make my weekly way from my Aldea Community-rooted home as

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Strange Coincidence? Jungian Synchronicity?: "Noonie" and I in Baraboo, Wisconsin the very day (May 31, 2014) of the sensational "Slender Man Stabbing" in Waukesha, Wisconsin. We had string beans with our fish-fry dinner that evening. My memory. Sad, anyone dying and not having someone to remember them.

a COVID-XIX-threatened widow to The Market Place grocery at the De Vargas mall in Santa Fe, my Coltrane CD playing "My Favorite Things".

About 2 years since Noonie's demise. I never knew from 1 day to the next what character he would be — serious or light or high or low. Fluidity. So now it's a long stretch for me to fly solo — 6 months into my Southwest adventure — and I am still *very* picky, *super* picky about finding another partner to star in my Reality-TV show, "Life after Noonie, Santa Fe": "Will a simple online 'Howdy-Doody' lead to a 'Johnny Angel?' Stay tuned." The theme song from the movie *High Noon* plays: "Do Not Forsake Me, O My Darlin' " would make a good promo for the show, too.

March 19th, when night and day are equal. I am caught between memories of the past, hopes for the future. A "liminal zone" Noonie would say. One minute I recall a fun

late May trip to the Circus Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin; then imagine myself riding a



My lipstick marred coffee cup.

pinto horse down a dusty trail outside Taos. Then I am again on a 3-day vacation back in Harbor Country, Michigan (Harbert to be precise), eating poached eggs with lentils for breakfast with Noonie at the famed Swedish Bakery and Luisa's Cafe (I have a lipstick-smeared coffee cup to prove it). Next minute, I am dressed to the nine's having an elegant 1st date with some suave gent, delighting in Southwest haute cuisine at Sazón (oh, those moles!), finding we have been seated near New Mexico Governor Michelle Luhan Grisham and her genderbending, overly expressive, sign-language interpreter. I see them performing their "digital" duet during the daily COVID-19



A duet of hands: Governor Michelle Luhan Grisham and her lively sign-language interpreter.





My southwest-style house in Aldea near Santa Fe.

emergency TV broadcast on Albuquerque's Channel 7 KOAT. They run a (punning on their call letters) heat-warming Christmas Coat drive for the poor each year.

Noonie and I loved travel. "Romping the world" we called it. It was our best form of togetherness. We were 2 peas-in-a-pod. We had our own private sign language for expressing delight in what we saw and imbibed on our sojourns. Before the searchlights playing on Notre-Dame de Paris and the Roman Forum, we both experienced those sites as visionary objects having the power to transport our minds towards the Other World. Noonie before the devastating Notre Dame conflagration. I am glad he was saved the deep sadness of that disaster. And now the disaster of a pandemic. Sites of our favorite travels empty of people, tinged by death. The world is dying and I'm an old clown. The disaster of having Donald Trump at our Ship of State's helm, sailing these dangerous seas. But I am sad Noonie didn't get to experience the enchantment of this Land of Enchantment other than the week's vacation we took here.

* *



Yellow-billed Cuckoo perched on the very tip of a naked branch in my backyard Aspen tree. It waits without a purpose (I wait with a purpose). Yet in the state of highest tension, it surveys the land as watch it, about to feed the dogs' breakfast. Not having seen it land, the bird seems to have emerged from another dimension. It is vision-inducing. The dogs' food must wait.

Yesterday, there were 3 robins forming an isosceles

triangle within the branches. The day before, a quincunx of thrushes. Noonie had this "thing" for isosceles triangles and quincunx arrays as metaphysical symbols. It's as if he is communicating with me now through *The Birds* (his favorite Hitchcock movie; he'd been



A pandemic of birds.



Trump Tweets, but like a nice bird.

targeted people like the coronavirus is doing now.

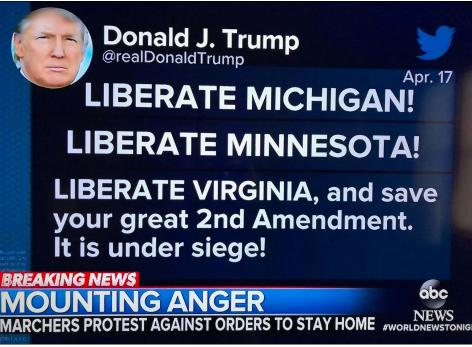
to Bodega Bay where it was filmed). These earlier sightings were made from my large king-size bed which faces out a large window. An Italian proverb: "Bed is the poor man's substitute for opera." I love opera. I'm afraid COVID XIX will decree the 2020 opera season closed. I also love bed. I often set my radio alarm clock to wake me from that bed at the 7 a.m., because the wonderful classical music station KHFM plays 2 minutes of bird song as a wake-up call.

Ugh! That jungle gym by the school in *The Birds*. Where the kids scramble like monkeys, practicing for adulthood. When Melanie later sees the massed birds on that webbed rigging it registered on me, sitting in a dark theater, as a vision out of Poe, an enlarged skeleton rippling with mouldering flesh from the grave. The birds

If Noonie were alive, he'd re-analyze *The Birds* in light of the pandemic. Toss up carrier pigeons as a sign of hope. According to Hitchcock, Melanie (Tippi Hedren) represented *smug complacency* getting its due. Like the smug neo-con New Deliverance Evangelistic Church bishop who defied social-distancing edicts, then contracted and died of the disease. The Reign of COVID XIX rips the facade off many things. Exposed racism underlying our society. Dr. Oz and others willing to sacrifice a small percentage of school children in order to get the annoying creatures (some budding Satans) out of their homes where they've been driving frustrated parents crazy. People willing to toss dice with Death only if they can FUCKING GO BACK TO WORK!

· *

It is the 11th anniversary of the day Noonie proposed we get married *for real* (after 12 years of pre-engagement engagement). Weirdly, this morning, lolling in a hypnopompic state between sleep and wakefulness in my king-size bed, I swore I felt Noonie (or something bodily) move into bed next to me. The bed sagged gently. I thought I felt *warmth*. Drowsily, I called out "Noonie!" Threw my right arm backward to feel him. Nothing.



A time of crisis concerning which Thomas Merton noted as far back as the 1960s was "a time of villains, saints, and Shakespearian characters." He words are even more accurate today.



Stupidity as seen on World News.



Noonie's favorite *The Far Side* comic, taped below a sign on his studio door which read: VALUE MY WORK? DO NOT KNOCK.

Around noon I was passing the front door and I heard the sound of key muddling around in the lock. It scared me. Aldea's NextDoor web postings warn of suspicious men in slow-moving trucks looking for homes to rob. I looked out a side window. No one. I opened the door. No one. No wind to make the door shake like that. Nothing. Is Noonie trying to do what famed

escape artist Harry Houdini wanted to do, communicate from the far-side of the grave? After all, Noonie's fav comic strip was Gary Larson's *The Far Side*.



My Pueblo-style living room's Southwest decor.

Some brains may transmit a lot of consciousness, others very little. Hence, smarts and inspiration, stupidity and uninspired commonplaceness. Noonie's was of the former. Republicans the latter. Some brains may permit the passage into individual consciousness of those shallows of the "Mother-Sea" — of which William James writes to explain his 1906 mystical experience — in which other minds happen to be paddling, or to have paddled, or to be about to paddle.

Might Noonie's mind be trying to mingle with mine today, the very day 11 years ago we shared Mionetto Prosecco with raw oysters and angel hair *pasta alla puttanesca* and I heard those pleading words of passionate commitment from him in a quaint (now defunct) Italian restaurant in an old wooden booth on Madison Avenue in Forest Park, Illinois?

I go to my library shelves built by my handyman whose Aztec given name, Mazatl, means *deer*. I grab some books Noonie and I had read and discussed in our like-peas-in-a-pod book club: Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, William James' *Memories and Studies*, and M. M. Moncrieff's *The Clairvoyant Theory of Perception*. I just sit in my gorgeous living room, in one of my red and white chairs, and cradle these books against my breast as memories flash by. I know that for dinner tonight I will make *strozzapreti* ("strangled priest") pasta (Noonie's fav) using my grandson's family-famous Marinara sauce recipe.

k



Laminated Trump tic-tac-toe board sent to my grandkids. "I play to people's fantasies" (Trump in *The Art of the Deal*).

The Indian world-age of *Kali Yuga* (1/4 good, 3/4 parts bad) began on February 11, 3102 BCE. And the *bad* has been increasing since. Especially since the 2016 election. Everyday I recite this mantra as beam after beam of information-rich colored light is fired at my brain via TV: "It's clear we ain't seen nuthin' yet."

It's been that way for Noonie during his 40-year stint teaching the Humanities. Skipping the politics and sticking to data, he taught intimate seminar-style classes with a max of 15 students (double that if you count the pupils, ha-ha), to 50 (100 pupils staring from a greater distance) crammed into a hot, overcrowded classroom, to a stark reversal, empty chairs, i.e., distance learning, now the norm during the reign of COVID XIX. Illumination obeying the in-

verse square law, the further the teacher from the student, the less the illumination.

Noonie envied my 1-on-1 relationship with patients, my big, comfy easy chair, my view over Millennium Park in Chicago (the only major city that is not hugging up against an ocean as if scared to go too far inland). But I envied Noonie's ability to arouse interest out of overworked young minds. Some of my patients fell asleep on my therapy couch — sometimes *I* fell asleep, too — awakening to be surprised nothing in square feet changed in my office. When Noonie and I were dating, college-aged wait staff at restaurants would approach and exclaim "Hi, professor! Wow, are you lucky to be dating him," or "Here are drinks on the house, prof," or "I'll seat you love birds at the best table." I took these courtesies as a positive sign of Noonie's personal qualities. He'd joke that he'd given them a "heads up" about our visit that night, paying them to sing his praises. Me? If one of my clients saw us dining out, they'd run in the other direction, hiding their face in shame.

Noonie taught at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, across from the twin lions in front of the Art Institute Museum. The museum had a few Géricault canvases (like *Head of a Guillotined Man*, 1818); most appropriate as the artist confessed, "I start to paint a woman, but it always ends up as a lion." Maybe that held true for the sculptor of those statues, too. Noonie's guiding light: "You have to question everything to create."

Noonie's department chair, Chad Armbuster, touted the school's administration's economic, policy-driven, managerial impetus. A poster of Géricault's 1819 painting *The Raft of the Medusa* hangs in his office, to which he'd point, threatening pro-union faculty with: "That could be *you!*" Spoke in a cold, smooth voice, tempered like old steel, in the *agentless passive* (a voice with no underlying subject): "It has always been asserted that ..."

Noonie suffered Chad's remarks "as painful as if he'd taken a steel nib and scratched the gelatin of a photograph of me, a bleeding scar appearing on me at exactly the same place." Countermeasures: my hubby'd sit silently, repeating "Acha Botchacha Sab Acha," while a grimace, faked into a smile, to mask his annoyance over the school's increasing micro-management of faculty. "I've had my body put to work, now they want my soul." Noonie left a wonderful written account of being summoned to Chad's office:

I — unreconciled with life — walk in. A toot, a snort sniff, sniffle, a scratch, a discrete finny probe — my sinuses are acting up. I tell the young receptionist — a dead-ringer for the Kosovar actress, Arta Dobroshi — "Gotta one p.m. with Chad. Tell him Agenbite of Dimwit is here. He'll know who." Her eyes enlarge a smidgen, as her mouth opens in disbelief, her face still a landscape unplowed by life. Through the grapevine, I've heard she is fond of conspiracy theories. She nips at a chocolate croissant, takes a sip from her Grande Mocha Frappuccino, then carries out my request. I sit. And I sit. And I sit. I imagine myself an academic action hero: I'm on the good ship Academe, where the captain and the first mate conspire to toss the crew overboard. I draw my pen (mightier than the sword) and hold them at bay. The fantasy fades as I become aware of the sonic "air-conditioning", i.e., neo-Muzak. A calibrated mood-inducer making brain-numbing secretarial labor less so, it features a Stimulus Progression Curve of ascending circuits for daylong mood maintenance. Delicious aural cocktails, sonic Prozac. At one point the soothed secretary must've taken a call from her boyfriend: "Niko ... NIKo ... NIKo ... NIKO!" She bangs the phone down. Waiting and waiting, I nearly get a chapter of Zadie Smith's White Teeth read before being admitted into King Chad's hallowed presence.

Chad and I sit *tête-a-tête*, our game faces on (in faculty meetings the mere sound of a smile would irritate him), parrying mask for mask. He's used to video conferencing, trained in self-monitoring his responses. A grim mist of master-plan leaks from his pores, spoiling the air. He's known for his knack of drawing a circumference around an issue then using this measurement to define elements within. His last e-mail to faculty was, "Keep it dry, gentlemen and ladies," referring to our course lectures. Overheard him tell one sad Precariat he just fired, "Just remember, high-net-academic-worth guys like myself find chunks of suckers like you in our stools every morning." Why, as rumor has it, he's on a fast-track to a top-admin job. He's confident. In contrast, I feel abject, tagged as "difficult". My reaction to all this shit? I replay my confidence mantra: *Act like a man of thought, think as a man of action, be aware face-to-face talk has no backspace — imagine him stuffed in a sack. There* is *another world beyond this one*.

What followed this meeting? There was this *soirée* for new faculty hired to teach massive open online courses (MOOCs, where software and wetware merge) at which Armbuster had told Noonie and his adjunct colleagues: "You contingies are an unraveling rope stretched betwixt Instructor and Prof Emeritus, and no dazzle-camouflage will save you," a threat inspired by a new administrative policy to cut part-timers.

Noonie and others had deep reservations about MOOC's and so suffered rebuke. The school's administration saw very large \$ \$ in their eyes when Instructure, a Utah-based learning software company, sent a smooth-talking company rep to hype Canvas Network, software that would connect faculty online to students anywhere in the world. Classrooms would become obsolete as The Cloud became the new virtual classroom. Fewer instructors, servicing more students, cutting overhead costs. Classes that did not fit this model cut or restructured. To the chagrin of many older faculty, the system went into trials and proved profitable. Now during the Reign of COVID XIX, the online system's use and profitability has proven itself in spades.

The irony about Chad's continual bullying of part-time faculty is that he is an *awful* teacher himself. Yersinia Pestis (see above Letter to the Editor) sent me a list of student critiques found online at Rate My Professor pertaining to Armbuster's pedagogical skills:

Tattletale: Went by his class on Henry James once; the door was open, and heard him say, "I could pounce on her possessions and ransack her drawers."

Ms. ESL: He harshes me when I talk not right. But I tell him because if you have English as your second language it's hard to make your head talk.

Insecure Inhere: I told him "I need to find a category. I need to find a category. If I don't find a category, I'm not safe." He said, "*Dunce* might work."

Paleface: Visited him in his office wearing my pink velour track suit; the dude avoided shaking hands and offered me a chair in the farthest corner of the room. His hands seemed inflamed, like from frequent washing and scrubbing.

Myfanwy Hertz: He's not bad looking, which is probably the only thing he has going for him. Otherwise, he is not exceptionally bright or even interesting to listen to. He may have other talents we are unaware of, but teaching is certainly not one of them. Very pretentious and truly boring.

Alwaz L'ahte: He's mean and walks about the classroom like some Greek god nobody has ever heard of. Liam Neesons [*sic*] is my shit, not him.

T. H. E. Wurst: Students teach class by presenting the material each week, teacher is not good at leading discussion, will learn a lot of information, but not a lot of knowledge. I prefer ideally bald professors.

Walsh Audte: Enough isms. Speak English and stop trying to thicken the dictionary. Eyes fixed wide, he once he threatened me, his pipe tip repeatedly bumping his chin, with: "I'm going to report you. Don't you *dare* make a prissy face at me!"

Pestis, in her research on "the sufferings of academia's precariat," went on to offer her pop psychology analysis of Chairman Armbuster:

Chad Armbuster is a "village despot", a typical Admin-type in that he displays systemic alteration of networks in the thalamic intralaminar nuclei and the prefrontal-parietal associative loop; hyperactivation of the neural correlates of rationalization is found present. This type of mind can watch the rest of its brain make its decisions cheerfully; it sees adjuncts not as faculty per se, or even people; they are mere "units of flexibility."

She went on to cite Shakespeare's *Hamlet* — Noonie 's and my fav play of the Bard's — to evoke academia as experienced by contingent faculty:

To tell the secrets of my prison-house, I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word Would harrow up they soul; freeze their young blood Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres.



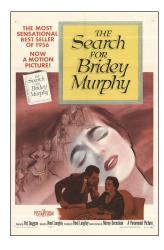
Interior of the typically empty Ryerson & Burnham Library, Chicago, IL.

Pestis said she plans on using this as an epigram in the book she plans to write on the second-class citizen status of "contingies" in academia's version of Jim Crow laws. She told me Noonie had sent her an email concerning The Ryerson and Burnham library housed in the AIC Museum. He told her it was founded in 1879 to service students and faculty at The School of the Art Institute. Eventually, their mission changed. They took to coddling the Museum's curatorial staff (sending desired books directly to staff who'd requested them and picking them up for return). In contrast, Noonie, and many students, were treated by a mostly all-white staff like a black man would be in the '50s South whenever they dared to step into those hallowed grounds for a book. "A sinecure for snobs." according to Noonie who'd been

humiliated at times by staff. He told Pestis the old library "had an elegant face, but deep inside its dank stacks it was devoid of active minds and stunk of musty, rarely trod corridors. I already knew of Noonie's avoidance of the place, his preference for other sources of academic mind-bait where staff were friendlier, helpful, enjoyed users of their resources.

* * *

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"Bridey Murphy" was a purported 19th-century Irish-woman whom U.S. housewife Virginia Tighe (b. 1923) claimed to have once been. In 1956, journalists, genealogists, and historians flocked to Ireland to investigate her claims of post-mortem survival through physical reincarnation. Scientists issued a report. Preachers warned their flocks of fads in faith. A teenager shot himself, saying that he wanted to investigate reincarnation personally. Morey Bernstein wrote a book about it, *The Search for Bridey Murphy*, which became a movie by the same name. People held Bridey Murphy parties ("come as you were") and parents greeted their newborns with "Welcome back." Will Noonie come back again? Eternal return. Will he be reborn at the stroke of noon, 3020?

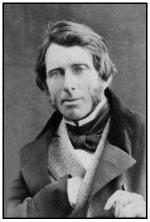


Our wedding cake.

If "Noonie" is an appropriate designator for my latehusband, "Bridey" works for me after Noonie asked the Big Question over raw oysters and Brut Bubbly at that Italian Trattoria. I played the role of Bride-to-Be to the hilt, becoming the reincarnation of all my imagined *past* bridal selves. I planned the wedding *perfectly* — I don't use that term lightly in every way: Bridey-designed invitations (silver on white), the date (May Day), dress (champagne-laced), fondant-covered cake topped with westie/scottie figures (Bjorn A. Gaine Bakers), flowers (calla lilies), photographs (I staged them), venue for the wedding dinner (Everest, a 1-Michelin Star eatery on the 40th floor of the Chicago Stock Exchange) with my stand-up comedian son as a wacky Master of Ceremonies who whipped up his snake-charmed audience to cheers, laughter, and tears as our hearts rose in the east and the sun set in the west over the

bustling Eisenhower Expressway.

Our honeymoon was taken 2 weeks later in Venice, Italy, staying at an elegant hotel, champagne awaiting us in our large room. Like the poet Byron long before, Noonie saw from our approaching motorboat taxi, "Venice's structures rise as the stroke of the Enchanter's wand, a pomp of pile in towering evidence of a dreamed of utopia," arising before him. It was his 1st trip there, I'd been to Venice before with my 1st husband. And, ominously in Noonie's case, that city was a sign of a sharp sense of loss, an indicator of a world irrecoverably changing, and a port of *farewell*. There my new hubby indulged his passion for: 1) the sea, especially islands (118 such fragments make up Venice); he often spoke of everything disintegrating into parts, and those parts into more parts; 2) exquisite



John Ruskin's framed portrait that sat on Noonie's desk.



Straight and twisted columns (Basilica of San Zeno, Verona) as noted in John Ruskin's famous *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53).

seafood (oh, yah!); and 3) musing on Ruskin, Turner, Pound, and Sartre's response to the canaled city's mysteries. I think that *water* (especially permeating Venice) was for Noonie a trope signifying both the realm of the real *and* the false, Being *and* Nothingness. Venice's topos made those realizations more vivid to him. It was a place his mind could dive deeper and come up muddier.

Noonie, ever the academic, was drawn to John Ruskin (d. 1900 of influenza) for that Brit's sense of separateness, his art criticism, his love of tortured architectural columns. Once living under the same roof, I began to notice that Noonie, at times, would (I think unconsciously) put his right hand inside his coat, mimicking Ruskin's pose in a cabinet card photo that sat prominently on his office desk. Noonie could be a comic mimic at times. He could do lip-synching to perfection, dance like a maniac. I always had a ticket for the front row.

In an entry in one of his many Moleskine notebooks, Noonie notes Ruskin's noting a peculiar pairing of a straight column and a twisted one in Verona's San Zeno Basilica. My hubby took inspiration and jotted: "The perfect figure for my writing: take something straight, appropriate it, but twist it. Ruskin again inspires me. "Fools 'Ruskin' were angels fear to tread" — he once said, one of his bad puns. I look at the photo

of the paired straight and twisted columns and think them a perfect model for US: me the straight column, he the twisted one, capped by a common purpose.

Noonie dug Ruskin's politics, his attacking a nation increasingly despising literature, science, art, and nature, despising compassion, and concentrating its soul on Money (sounds like Trump's America). He told me once, "I read *Fors Clavigera* [Ruskin's series



COVID XIX: "Let me roll the dice."

of letters starting in the 1870s addressed to British workmen] — and saw that author's 'aleatory' approach to writing allowed him free reign to make random associations and digressions. That approach informs my own modest scribbles." Noonie *was* taken with Chance. As a kid, he loved playing dice and poker, using Pringles as poker chips. He even had a small roulette wheel and usually bet on odd numbers. He referred to existence, both macro and micro, as The Toss of the Cosmic [sometimes as Comic] Dice, which a car bumper sticker simply summed up as: SHIT HAPPENS. "Maybe *this* will happen, maybe *that* will happen," he'd say



to me. Made me smile. But now I see bumper stickers reading WHO'S NEXT?

I am reclining on my gun metal gray chaise longue in my backyard brick patio, dogs lulling nearby. Suddenly, my mind passes from these

musings to the skelter of moles along the small of my back, areas of irritation no longer scratched by Noonie. I miss his touches, caresses, his many layers. Me, no longer amused by his *maybeing*. And he is no longer a recipient of my babying arms. Going from memories of my birds-atwitter moments with him, to seeing his death mask in the ever-changing



clouds rushing overhead in a sea of blue, clouds fast leaving me behind, I suffer the soulsapping sorrow of widowhood. Oh, oh, oh, will I find someone, someone else, during this awful Reign of COVID XIX, who can scratch me where I need to be scratched — both physically and mentally? Noonie would give me poor odds.

But Picky *will* be hunting. Hunting the personals in *The Santa Fe New Mexican* maybe only finding something like:

My brick patio with kiva fireplace, where an owl nested (see p. 177).

TALL, BROWN EYES, LORD BYRON HAIR

Seeks epistolary companion with lily pad tongue and luck at black jack.

And my ad? Maybe something like:

CROCUS, DAFFODIL, SNOWDROP

Nature-loving Jewish woman wishes to walk, 6-feet distanced, with male kindred spirit. Let's savor the joy of spring and find blue scilla, then take off our masks, for a brief moment, before we go out for sushi.

* *

DIAMOND® plaster finish. I run my right hand along the hard, smooth wall surface of my Pueblo Revival home as I walk from my bedroom to my kitchen. It is a tactile sensation new to me. No other wall I've ever touched felt like this. Does remind me of rubbing Noonie's back. His back was so smooth, not like mine with its skelter of moles. One of many reasons I bought his house.

The main reason for moving to New Mexico from Illinois was because of the Grim Reaper. My younger brother died (diabetes), my older brother died (cancer). My mother died (heart failure). My father had been dead for nearly 50 years. Many close friends passed. My sons moved far away from Chicago. No relatives close to Oak Park anymore. Noonie's parents, his sister, and several cousins died just prior to his demise. Noonie and I had talked about retirement. We both have had years of cramped up city life; maybe life can be simple again. At 1st we thought San Miguel de Allende, Mexico as an ideal place. So we booked the best hotel. Checked in and to our surprise they upgraded us to room 227, very date of our very 1st date (February 27). "Now that's one helluva rockin' rollin' of the cosmic dice!" boomed Noonie. But we eventually realized as oldsters, we'd be better off in the States. The side walks were uneven and narrow; not conducive to elder walks. Healthcare for more serious problem meant a 6 hour drive to Mexico City. Now Santa Fe, New Mexico was something like San Miguel, but more practical. We'd been to Santa Fe before to attend the Creativity and Madness Conference held every July there. We immediately fell in love with, well, *everything* about the historic place. The weather, the siting of the city, its architecture, the mountains, the diversity of the people, the outdoor opera, the Lensic Theater, the plaza with its many events, the Indian Market. We started searching Zillow for property. Then Noonie — his only real academic crime was playing tennis — died.



Cliff Dwellers Literary Club, the railing in the far background is where Noonie fell or was pushed off.

His demise, Ι shudder to think about it. The irony of its location. The Cliff Dwellers Literary Club on Michigan Avenue. A faculty dinner fête hosted by the Dean and Noonie's Chairman, Chad Armbuster. That evening, as inquest testimony has it, the event was just breaking up, everyone distracted with backslaps and glad-handing, or grabbing at tasty residual canapés. A snobby staff member

of the Art Institute Museum's Ryerson and Burnham Library (Joy Slough-Burn, oval face, cruel eyes) testified my hubby was "Hovering about the desserts, a glass of sherry in hand"

— but this doesn't jive with my hubby's avoidance of sweets and liquor due to his Type 2 diabetes — "when the next moment there was confusion and cries from directly below the Club's outdoor deck [see photo on previous page]. Someone screamed, 'He's entered the seventh oblivion!' Ergo, life's pages about a man with no spine, became a closed book." I was furious!

Day after day of testimony. Twenty-two stories above, most faculty oblivious to the horror below, swayed to the last song of the night, The Beach Boys' hit *God Only Knows*

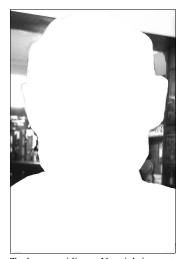


What I'd Be Without You." The Dean's secretary, Glottis Breathwaite, minus her coke-bottle lens glasses, testified seeing Noonie dangling by one hand from the cast iron railing (yes, Noonie loved Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*), screaming: "Like Adrian Piper feared!" before he lost his grip (a reference to an artist/academic who claims hostile academics wanted her *Kaput*). The scream of sirens. When paramedics arrived below, a *lime green*

handkerchief had been place over my lovie's face. Investigators told me traumatized witnesses didn't recall who put it there, but that the green color was gay hanky code for "Will buy dinner". Taken as evidence, the police later released the fabric to me. I later had the words NON FRUSTRA VIXI ("I lived not in vain") embroidered on it by a Hungarian seamstress I know; this bloodstained rag now hangs in my corner-of-the-bedroom Hubby Shrine, snug between Diamond plaster finish walls.

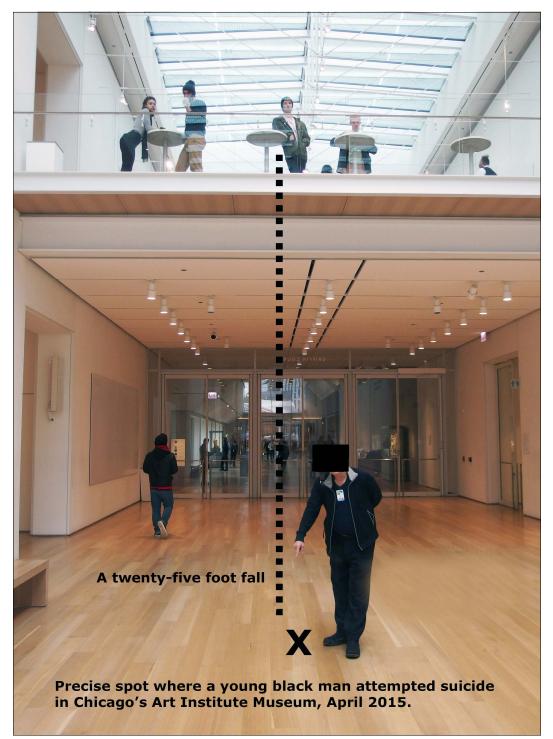
The investigation into Noonie's demise was haphazard (or underhandedly skewed by powerful forces at the school). Once, a suicide jump from a balcony inside the famed Art Institute of Chicago Museum, which Noonie witnessed 1st hand, was hushed up completely. Zero TV or newspaper coverage. Nor did police detain and question the museum goers who saw it happen.

The coroner's verdict on Noonie's death was inconclusive. Contributing factors



To those presiding at Noonie's inquest, he was just a blank face.

were suggested: 1) a bee attack, the sting startling him, he fell accidently; or 2) exposure to *Toxoplasma gondii*, a parasite transmitted by cats, as cat hair was found on his pants, inducing paranoia, recklessness (yah, he *was* toxically allergic to such) and a leap over the railing by mistake; or 3) obsession, depression, suicidal tendencies, bipolarity. Concerning the latter, the school's librarian testified Noonie was disturbed: "After a suicide by a black man in the AIC Museum was *erased*, so to speak, he became fixated on Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal. Especially on that author's suspicious death by falling from a fifth-floor window of Prague's Bulovka hospital while feeding pigeons. He learned that Hrabal lived in a fifth-floor window feature in several of Hrabal's books." And Noonie's basement office



After witnessing this horrific suicide attempt, Noonie began obsessively photographing incidents of fatal jumps from various TV movies (see page v). The event was hushed up, no mention in the papers.

office mate, Charmian, explained that Noonie "had a personal thing for the marvelous number five, especially its geometrical expression as a quincunx, as seen on dice and found in Robbe-Grillet's 'New Novel,' *Jealousy*, where the protagonist's plantation's banana trees are laid out in groups of quincunxes."

Beware of premature closure, I thought, during the painful inquest.



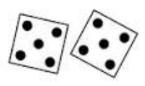
Monument to the Admin-Type, The Talking Claw, detail of photo by Lewis Koch.

These embarrassing *obsessions* brought out during the inquest and Noonie's political tensions with the school's Admin-Types (he called them "Talking Claws"), further obfuscated circumstances surrounding his demise. Chad encouraged someone from his department to leak a memo about how Noonie had been AWOL for 11 days after the "The Lair of the Talking Claw" (Dean's Office in Noonie's terminology) received a threatening e-mail concerning his "paranoid concern" over "a micro-managing bureaucracy" that made "teaching increasing difficult," reinforcing his belief that "We now live in a universe where accounting procedures define the very fabric of reality."

In an attempt to further impugn Noonie's mental stability and divert attention from Chad's own noxious departmental politics, Armbuster testified that my hubby was "very strange, made insupportable assaults, paranoid

confrications, often was seen wiping clean empty classroom blackboards with a mixture of water and bleach on days he wasn't teaching," and was "known by the weird moniker — Noonie." I winched. Armbuster's face that last day of testimony was like a law of nature — a thing one could not question, alter, or implore. It had high cheek-bones, over gaunt, hollow cheeks; gray eyes, cold and steady; a contemptuous mouth, shut tight, the mouth of an executioner. The inquest's verdict was a quantum physics conundrum:

MAYBE DEATH EITHER BY SUICIDE, MAYBE BY EXTREME PREJUDICE BY PERSON OR PERSONS UNKNOWN. In either case,



Noonie was D.E.A.D. A cosmic crap shoot in which the dies came up a double quincunx angled to look like a cartoon figure's X'd out eyes, the sign of having been cold-conked byThe Grim Reaper.



The denigration Noonie suffered at that inquest — he couldn't defend himself — *well* . . .

Few understood that my hubby voyaged through strange seas of thought, alone. He never met with any branch of human knowledge he wasn't curious about; nor was there any form of art that didn't give him acute pleasure. He was an autodidact. A superb lecturer. A curse to the more dryasdust *dons* at his school, especially for this love of the ludic. He agreed with Ruskin's wacky idea to disguise the trains of his day as fire-breathing dragons. He thought the name of the British engineer who built the 19th-century steamship *The Great Eastern,* Isambard Kingdom Brunel, taken out of context, was sheer Surrealist poetry, revealing something of the unknown. Sometimes I call my shipshape home here, becalmed in the high desert of New Mexico, *The Great Western Peaceable Kingdom*.

One crusty old don in particular, Phred, an ex-nun who married an ex-rabbi, had it in for Noonie. She'd done her Ph.D. thesis, Paradise Lost is Syntax Regained, on Milton at Oxford (where many a peer of England brews livelier liquor than the Muse). Betweenwhiles, this "not to know me argues yourselves unknown" was given tenure in Noonie's department after her controversial series of bitter attacks in various obscure journals on François Rabelais' Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel (a pentalogy of novels written in the 16th century telling the adventures of 2 giants, Gargantua and his son Pantagruel) drew Chad Armbuster's attention. This led to further unsmiling research on her part, followed by attacks on Russian theorist Mikahil Bahktin's famous elucidation of Rabelais' ribald works via his ludic concept of *the carnivalesque*, i.e., that carnival events in the Middle Ages were ultimately subversive, a topsy-turvying of the rigid social hierarchies of feudalism. During these yearly festivals, low became high (drunks were appointed as kings) and high low (nobles became drunks). This reversal, argued Bahktin, backfired on the-powers-that-be, destablizing their monologic discourse of power. The increasing interest and use of the concept carnivalesque in contemporary theory irked Phred. Ultimately, it lead to fueling a running feud between her and Noonie, nearly as bitter as that between my ex-husband and I (recall my friend Melanie's weekly query, "Got your 'get' yet?") My love who loved humor, who adored Rabelais and Bahktin's analysis of his writings thanks to a laugh-aminute summer reading Rabelais' pentalogy while serving in the Air Force as base photographer (1967 - 71) at Travis AFB, California. Now COVID-19 patients are being sent



COVID-19 virus magnified, or it could be a close-up of my new bathroom rug.

there from infected cruise ships to *quarantine* (the word originates from the 40 days a ship's crew had to remain on board upon arriving at Venice during the Black Death). He could easily cite hilarious passages from memory. In fact, *would* cite them in faculty meetings just to "get Phred's goat". Just between you and me, a lot of this enmity had to do with Noonie having suffered innumerable hours under the button-down instruction of "penguins", Catholic nuns.

* *

In comparison with the tense politics of Noonie's job, my private practice had zero politics. Before retirement, I had the best of all possible bosses — me. I set my own schedule, 6 hours per day per week starting at 1 p.m. Only when I went to board meetings at the Chicago Center for Psychoanalysis — I was a long-time member and former candidate — did I enter the tricky terrain of egos and vetoes. However, prior to starting my own practice, I worked at a mental health facility under a jerk who began to sexually harass me. When I shrugged off his advances, he tried to get me fired. My then husband, a labor lawyer, helped me file a sexual discrimination suit against him and the facility. Although, they didn't fire him —



he was later dumped for financial misconduct — I collected BIG. Enough bucks to open my own office. And "rest is history," as they say. Smooth sailing since. Up in a justright size high-rise office overlooking Chicago's Millennial Park's "Bean" sculpture, where Noonie's taken photos of us reflected in that tourist magnet.

So it has been now years of seeing talented, but suffering, people trying to reach

toward a more integrated self. Many succeeding. I now get cards of thanks from many of them. But sitting for hours on end hearing painful stories, when I returned home I just wanted to take my heavy dose of Chillaxin, laying, on my couch with my 2 dogs, staring at my large flat TV watching: "House Hunters International", British TV murder mysteries, Hallmark Channel mysteries in which no one frowns and heterosexual matches are never consummated, and "The Real Housewives of New Jersey" in which everyone frowns, screams, and flips tables. A Realty-TV show sure to send Noonie upstairs to his office to watch "Star Trek" re-runs (he'd worked on the special effects for *Star Trek: the Movie*,1979).

In Santa Fe, *sans* Noonie, sitting before a super humongous flat TV, Hallmark Channel announces, celebrating the Reign of COVID XIX, a new TV mystery series, "Red Herrings and Brunettes". After watching 2 episodes, I can tell you it's a wacky mash-up of "Real Housewives" meets "Mystery Woman". The good guys are masked and keep social distancing, the bad guys skip protection and don't keep a distance. If you look closely, you can sometimes see in the background, masked, her hair dyed, Hallmark actress Lori Loughlin playing an extra's role, like filing documents, waiting tables, crossing a street, waving down a taxi, walking into an elevator, etc. Menial acting work paying enough, I'm sure, to pay her maid, before she, probably, ends up walking into prison, her final role.

Excuse me now. The dogs need their pills and food. I need to microwave a chicken pot pie and watch the 3rd episode of "Red Herrings and Brunettes".



"Organized lying and non-stop distraction," that is what Noonie said after the 2016 election, "The Era of the Immanent Baboon" where rationalized unreason is the soup de jour. Surely it's obvious.

I was 1st attracted to Noonie because of his political savvy, his passion for justice. The fact that he taught a course, "Art and Urban Life", exploring

the themes of utopia/dystopia in literature, art, and architecture. It's highlight was a lecture on Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali campus *cum* utopian community Santiniketan, which was initially founded as a means of alternative education to the dominant British system. The Otolith Group (Brits Sagar and Eshun) filmed a 2018 documentary, *O Horizon*, about it.

Impressed him when I rather boozily recited a bit of W. H. Auden (on the death of Yeats) over our favorite cocktail, Fuzzy Navels (peach schnapps and orange juice), as we simmered in my back deck's hot tub after we, like two-peas-in-a-pod, pumped the pedals of my green Trek tandem bike (Noonie pedaling lackadaisically at the rear) up lovely summer cycling trails to Chicago's Botanical Garden and back:

Time is intolerant Of the brave and innocent, And indifferent in a week To a beautiful physique.

And now, a time that pardons cowardice, conceit, and lays its honors at their feet. A time of trumpeting Trump who struts and frets his hour upon the stage, telling tales told by a total idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.



The press takes him literally, but not seriously; his supporters take him seriously, but not literally.



On the positive side, it is April 22nd, Earth Day. Taos County, according to KOAT news, has gotten their 1st electric car. Noonie told me he attended the 1st Earth Day, 50 years ago, held at the University of California, Davis campus. Said he'd never forget it: "The worlds of gray theory, green life, and many-colored poetry and dress comingled that day." Five

years later, *Ecotopia* was published. Ernst Callenbach's utopic vision of Northern California's secession from Southern, followed by the establishment of a progressive, ecologically advanced society. Basically, a Hippy-like society whose ethical and philosophical implications were more Buddhist than Christian, more Native American in outlook, whose economic theory was influenced by E. F. Schumacher's book *Small is Beautiful*. Noonie later used *Ecotopia* as a text in his Art and Urban Life course to raise the question of our inhumanity to Nature. But his students, increasing under the sway of neo-con ideology and Ayn Rand novels — one student had WHO IS JOHN GALT? written on the cover of his notebook, another wore a LIBERALS EAT BABIES T-shirt to class — balked at many of the social reforms offered in that book. Noonie often complained that his students were increasingly becoming self-righteous, intolerant of any weakness or flaw in an author's character. One of Noonie's colleagues had to forgo teaching Twain's *Tom Sawyer* because students couldn't write about themselves as it furthers the white patriarchy, yet woe be to those who attempt to write about other groups! A real catch-22.

Earth Day, a time to recall how keenly Noonie felt about my Midwest garden, my green thumb skills. My Saturday perseverance on my knees from which I entered the house exhausted, covered in dirt and sweat. I had initially started gardening as "green therapy" during my divorce; afterwards, it became a relaxing obsession admired by Noonie when he 1st came to my house. He adored irises, the way they opened their petals. Astounding and calm. He said, "Irises are like prophecies." In a Moleskine notebooks dated 2008, he elegantly captured the "miracle" that was occurring in my own backyard:

My wife's garden miniaturizes the countryside, when framed by the back window next to my breakfast table and cup of Keurig-brewed coffee. A rare archangel with a harp guards the fenced enclosure populated with nymphs and gnomes, a reminder (says my wife) that attention is best given to the senses and expressed through myth. Sense becomes scent, a light vapor, matter animated. Here vegetables are as wellpackaged as jam. Her garden is home to fish, birds, insects, the neighbor's cats (Bouba and Kiki), rabbits, mice, and nature's dice. They all, and humans too, eat and drink there, sagaciously or not. My wife, an *avant-gardener* with a big green thumb, claims, "If you are at all capable of writing, you can design a garden." Writing in French, Picky describes her garden as *floréal-prairial*. She loves to

arrange *bouquets* (does she have Japanese genes?) which, according to her, expresses an intersection in a vased place of multiple cascades as all the stems and petals come synergetically together. Ah, then the scent: no single component can be singled out. It's a whole of things — a gestalt — and it can revive memory, turn the klieg lights on the past, but a past thought of as being in front on a path.



My Midwest garden and koi pond with Snowy. The plants praise Picky: "Your good work with us hasn't gone unnoticed."

My hubby isn't here now to praise, either by voice or written account, my efforts at doing a Southwest garden. I tear up read somewhere one can cry too long and end up with blurred vision — thinking I will never see you again reading on a recliner on our wooden deck listening to the pond water bubble, watching the lunker koi, smelling the vibrant flowers in your peripheral vision. I will never see you again watching me plant a plant while listening

to Robert Plant's "A Stairway to Heaven" on my boom-box. But you are not wholly hidden, as your brightness never sets.

A garden, then, only for me, for which I have today in May (*Úimúya* in Hopi, "the Planting Moon") ordered:

Nepeta "Walker's Low" Achillea filipendulina "Gold Plate" Delphinium elatum "Blue Nile" Blackmore & Landon Agapanthus "Midnight Blue" Euphorbia "Diamond Frost" Impatiens "SunPatiens Vigorous Tropical Orange" "Summer Enchantment" Rose & Clematis Duo Red and Purple Clematis

Oh, it will all look so perfect, smell so wonderful! But my dogs! With their 300 million odor receptors to my 6 million, they will be in doggy bliss. I will hear buzzing bees, see humming birds. The dogs will spy a bunny's cautious bounce toward my garden and repel the cute invader by frantic barking.

As I think of planting my plants, metaphysical poet George Herbert's words touch me from across the sands of time: "Who could have thought my shriveled heart / Could have recovered greenness." Such that "now in age I bud again." At age 75, I *will* bud again.



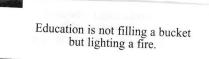
As I prepare for bed, watching KOAT news hosted by a female TV anchor with the largest eyes I've ever seen, with my dogs sacked out at my side, a lemon cherry cheese Danish for a nightcap — sad news. Helen Damico, Beowulf scholar and Professor Emerita from the University of New Mexico where she founded the department of Medieval Studies, passed from the COVID virus today. Back when I was working on my M.A. in English Lit at U of C, I was required to attend a lecture by her at our college on that important text. *Beowulf* is to England what Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey* are to ancient Greece. I look up *Beowulf*

online, see lovely lines that are Earth Day appropriate:

A powerful monster, living down / In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient/As day after day the music rang / Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing/ Call and the poet's clear songs, sung/ Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling/ The Almighty making the earth, shaping/These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,/ Then proudly setting the sun and moon/ To glow across the land and light it;/ The corners of the earth were made lovely with trees/ And leaves, made quick with life.

Read it my junior year at college. Aah, that Old English!— how Beowulf (the name may mean "bear"), a Geat (the laughs in class these days, students calling him a "Geek"), son of Edgetho, and nephew of Higlac, King of the Geats (Geeks), kicked the ass of the awful maneating, lake-dwelling monster, Grendel. I can still see myself exiting the El, buying a Danish at Gunkel's, and startling mom by redubbing my shy female pug puppy "Beawolf". An unconscious desire for female empowerment pre-1970s 2nd-wave feminism?

I pull out my iPad . . . tap, tap, tap, tap . . . Rate My Professor reviews has Damico listed! I scroll down. The ratings have Damico as demanding, but fair: "Damico is Old



My fortune cookie from Lulu's Chinese.

School where the requirements for a good grade are
dedication to the subject and a real work-ethic." Too bad we don't have more "old school" profs, huh? Maybe some of those lackadaisical students Noonie
encountered would really learn something. Surely, Damico had strong feelings about "The Twitter-

ization of the Academic Mind," of how social media imperils scholarship. Noonie did, too.

We sure could use a larger than life Beowulfian hero to slay The Beast, that Grendel reigning over the world now, COVID XIX. Today, New York Mayor Andrew Cuomo has swung a mighty media sword, challenging those monsters Trump and Mitch McConnell.

Speaking of professor reviews, Noonie had jotted down these student evaluations on his Chairman's teaching performance as listed on Rate Your Professor website:

Tattletale: Went by his class on Henry James once; the door was open, and heard him say, "I could pounce on her possessions and ransack her drawers."

Ms. ESL: He harshes me when I talk not right. But I tell him because if you have English as your second language it's hard to make your head talk.

Insecure Inhere: I told him "I need to find a category. I need to find a category. If I don't find a category, I'm not safe." He said, "Dunce might work."

Paleface: Visited him in his office wearing my pink velour track suit; the dude avoided shaking hands and offered me a chair in the farthest corner of the room. His hands seemed inflamed, like from frequent washing and scrubbing.

MYFANWY HERTZ: He's not bad looking, which is probably the only thing he has going for him. Otherwise, he is not exceptionally bright or even interesting to listen to. He may have other talents we are unaware of, but teaching is certainly not one of them. Very pretentious and truly boring.

ALWAZ L'AHTE: He's mean and walks about the classroom like some Greek god nobody has ever heard of. Liam Neesons [sic] is my shit, not him.

T.H.E. WURST: Students teach class by presenting the material each week, teacher is not good at leading discussion, will learn a lot of information, but not a lot of knowledge. I prefer ideally bald professors.

WALSH AUDTE: Enough isms. Speak English and stop trying to thicken the dictionary. Once he threatened me with: "I'm going to report you. Don't you dare make a prissy face at me!"



Noonie's class "Art and Urban Life" during a break. 'X' marks his lectern. Noonie fights the instrumentalization of education that increasingly accepts it's only role is to reproduce the labor force.

* * *

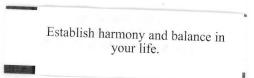
3.0

I don't always like what my dearly deceased decoder of the *Istigkeit* (The *isness* of things) writes — er, wrote — but this passage from a book left, sadly, unfinished by Noonie, is a perfect sort of screen-capture of "Spring in Illinois".

It is spring tide and the caterpillars are alive and leering, their unviolated and recreated milkers in the structures of embers. The countryside returns from the abstract white void of winter's system. The multiple takes the place of the single. Life trusting in chance and loathing reason, like Henri Bergson! I trusting in astral dream bodies à la William Burroughs. In the city — the industrial solution of movement and heat — nothing new under the solitary sun. Never-ending, homogeneous rows prevent or efface any watered-silk effect; the urban isotrope excludes the unexpected, laws replace pointillist permutations. A keen, constant, implacable wind combs the Midwestern prairie beneath a motionless sky, an immaculate dark-blue sky. But the sky — open to chance fluctuation, unexpected storms, or atmospheric disturbances — spreads stochastically across the corn fields and through the space of the high seas.

"You gotta beware the Big Shampoo asweepin' in from the Sou'west," warns Dallas [our PI friend]. "It can wash ya and yer abode offa the plains in seconds, one of those storms with a diameter of redoublin' state budgets. Unsafe. But if yer optimistic, ya can make nougat out of jubilant, festerin' weather." Gardeners tend to do just that.

New to New Mexico, I have yet to live a full spring here. Yet to experience the Big Shampoo of torrential rains that scrub the dry arroyos clean. A biblical Great Flood that every year sweeps bathers and fly fishermen to a watery doom.



What I want to do, living here, has been fortuitously announced in a Chinese fortune cookie stuffed in my Lu Lu's supper order tonight — they deliver during the Reign of COVID XIX. By the way, Lu Lu's Chinese on

Cerrillos Road has the best Pork Egg Foo Young and Pork with Green Beans. I have, despite being Jewish, a heretical craving for pork dishes. Say "pork belly" and I immediately respond like a startled deer: stop, perk my ears, and run to the source. But I've yet to find dim sum breakfast served here. Something Noonie and I craved.

Silly as it may seem, Noonie and I shared a "skeptical belief" in fortunes, these "egg rolls of the comic dice," as he punningly put it. Laughing, we'd eagerly rip them out of each other's hands to see the message. Noonie liked to paste appropriate ones into his fiction writing. So I've done the same, to honor his memory.

* *



An "egg roll of the comic dice" on TV today: Trump springing on the benefits of UV and Clorox bleach, turning, looking for verification from stunned medical experts sitting to his right who sport deercaught-in-the-headlights expressions. Hive-minded followers of the Immanent Baboon are sure to be rushed to emergency rooms for disinfectant poisoning in an almost Jim Jones moment. I am sure he will turn this back, somehow, onto the Fake News.

I am sitting in my large TV room's comfy chair, my iPad on my lap. Musing about the parallel between software computer virus threats and our wetware pandemic. I tap, tap, tap into my Facebook account. I see my friend Melanie, who is an audiologist, posted today

on her page: She advises her list of "Friends":

PERK YOUR EARS UP! CLEAR THE WAX. THIS IS A MUST READ: Chinese-American Ling Ma's recent 2018 novel Severance. So prescient! A COVID-like virus, highly contagious, called Shen Fever for its origin in sweat-shop factories in Shenzhen, China, threatens the world. A travel-ban from Asian countries is passed. BTW Picky's late husband (he should've gotten a hearing aid) would have liked the sound of this: the virus is an obvious reference for the spread of the evils of post-industrial global capitalism where the wealth we create brings no general widespread benefit. Check it out, its Googlicious!

She goes on to describe in detail how the virus turns its victims into Zombie-like performers carrying out an infinite loop of banal activities. TV images of workers at Amazon packing up product for shipping flash before me. Ignoring a pleading text ring from my granddaughter, I Google the novel and find a *New Yorker* review by Jiayang Fan:

When the novel opens, a group is fleeing an epidemic that has decimated the global population; one man says that life has come to feel like a "zombie or vampire flick." The group's leader replies, "Let's think about the zombie narrative. It's not about a specific villain. One zombie can be easily killed, but a hundred zombies is another issue. Only amassed do they really pose a threat. This narrative, then, is not about any individual entity, per se, but about an abstract force: the force of the mob, of mob mentality. Perhaps it's better known these days as the hive mind. You hearing me?

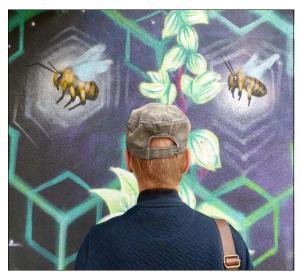
I stare out the TV room's window at the green clumps of piñon trees spread out among the rolling hills of our community's common "grass belt". My mind wanders. I think about the network of trackers working for Facebook who are a most likely right now charting what I am reading online. My car insurance company offered me a rate discount if



I let them monitor my Fitbit usage. No way, Jose! Nor will I toss it as Noonie once suggested, especially now with COVID stalking us. Then there are the trackers who offer us digital sugar junkies tasty "cookies", the Web's 1st and most important surveillance tool at the service of surveillance capitalism (learned that from Noonie and my computer savvy son). Now, there are data-gathers like Descartes Labs on Guadalupe Street here in Santa Fe tracing the hurry and scurry of New Mexicans during the lockdown (gobbledygook by Descartes CEO on KOAT news about how this *isn't* a violation of privacy). It

is like we are *in* a hive, its all-knowing queen bee being golden blonde Governor Michelle Luhan Grisham. Not that I don't mostly approve of her policies, she's a honey.

As if on cue — the roll of the Cosmic Dice — a bee, the 1st I've seen this Spring, taps against my window. What delight! A whole range items bee-ish, flow through my mind like thick honey: 1) hate is a hand-made *piñata* filled with bees; 2) the sweet smell of green chili stew at our local Bumble Bee's Baja Grill; 3) my kinship with plants is akin to that of bees; John Ruskin pondered what a bee's chin might be like; 4) I inherited Noonie's red underlined paperback of Ernst Jünger's *The Glass Bees*; 5) I took a flick of Noonie before a bee-mural in Santa Fe 3 years ago; and 6) my Oak Park Garden Club once had a guest lecturer wax eloquent on Slovenian love of bees — a sticky topic as it had become known a pact against federal Yugoslavia was concocted by Slovenian president Milan Ku an and Serbian president Slobodan Miloševi on January 24, 1991, that months before the 1st military clashes, Miloševi agreed that Slovenia was free to secede from Yugoslavia, and Slovenia agreed that Serbs had a right to live in one country; he talked and showed slides on how Ljubljana, Slovenia became famous for its honey, promoted the new tourist



Noonie staring at a bee mural in the Railyard art district of Santa Fe.

attracting Bee Path, established by the Society of Urban Bee-keepers in October 2015, boasting 31 members from educational, cultural, economic, and health institutions to bee-keepers and bee-keeping societies. Bee-hives (and bee-murals) are placed in various locations in urban Ljubljana; and finally, 6) "To be or not to be." Or, better, to find a way of being in this world while not being of it.

Like the bees's hive, home is home-made. At least in part. I've had this comic dialogue with myself more than once:

"Pray, ma'am, where doth you live?"

"Why, obviously, in a symmetrical Noonie-verse, one that is a mirror-image of itself without too much disturbance, at least for a *ma'am*, if not for a *sir*."

Sounds too much like something out of *Alice in Wonderland*, huh? But I do think of all the possible worlds (hives) we as a species have chosen to live in (or been compelled to by heredity and upbringing, or simply by chance circumstance). Certainly those wearing MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN hats live in their own *Umwelt* (the world as it is experienced by a particular organism).

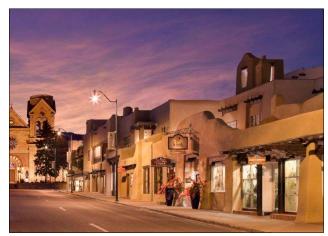
"Please use that in a sentence, ma'am."

"Okay. The world they perceive, their Umwelt, is different."

"Thanks."

Consider the *Umwelt* of the typical Trump trumpeter: it feeds when it can (science can only be shoved down its throat), it breeds at the periodical command of its body chemistry, and, whenever any solid, rational argument passes between it and the illumination that filters down from the Immanent Baboon (i.e., ideology), it bunches its prickles and points them menacingly in the direction from which the shadow is cast. The universes we inhabit are, to a considerable extent, created by the language we speak, by dialects, and the more focused political neo-con "new speak" taught over media networks, like Fox News, Alt-Right websites, paranoid Blogs, and so forth. "Freedom" now means various things to people in various island universes.

My (our) *Umwelt*(s) has (have) changed dramatically due to the barbaric Reign of COVID XIX (sorry to toss you all these curves, Noonie liked parentheses). We are, as I've suggest above, multiple amphibians inhabiting half a dozen disparate universes at the same time. When I walked the streets of Chicago's Loop, I'd pass black citizens from the innercity, what Spike Lee dubbed "Chi-Raq," aware that we may share a public moment, but our worlds were vastly different. Noonie'd expatiate on this very human fact. "There are 3 thousand million plus *loci* of private and unshareable experience now extant." When we



La Fonda on the Plaza Hotel, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

were in Santa Fe for the Creativity and Madness Conference — extreme poles of mood that Noonie existed in between — walking among the vendors at the Native Indian market, he said it was like "visiting another galaxy" or like "time-travel." In contradistinction to these deeply spiritual longoccupiers of this land, he noted we colonists were: "Created sick, yet commanded to be sound, yet failed at every turn." It was

Noonie who turned me on to N. Scott Momaday's *House of Dawn*. Just as I turned Noonie on to the story of the many Harvey Hotels which followed the railroad expansion across this western land, encouraging Easterners to move west. Young women, "Harvey Girls" — I take inspiration from them — braved the long journey from the relative safety of the East to cook and serve tables in such faraway places in high hopes of hunting down a perfect hubby. The La Fonda Hotel on the Plaza originally was one of many Harvey Hotels dotting the West.

Was. The past tense of *is* or where I *used to* buy my elegant clothes, Johnny Was, a store near La Fonda in the Plaza. It *is*, but I don't patronize them any longer. Noonie, *was*. Used to be *is*. How can I buy a piece of Was *high* couture when Noonie *is low*, down under?

I think I will have a double gin and tonic. Enjoy its *isness*.

* *

This morning. Still a bit hung over. I want to armchair-explore how earlier plagues had impacted societies, so I Google 'n re-oogle texts I had to read in college:

1) Daniel Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year (1722):

It was about the beginning of September, 1664, that I, among the rest of my neighbours, heard in ordinary discourse that the plague was returned again in Holland; for it had been very violent there, and particularly at Amsterdam and Rotterdam, in the year 1663, whither, they say, it was brought, some said from Italy, others from the Levant, among some goods which were brought home by their Turkey fleet; others said it was brought from Candia; others from Cyprus. It mattered not from whence it came; but all agreed it was come into Holland again. . . . The people showed a great concern at this, and began to be alarmed all over the town, and the more, because in the last week in December 1664 another man died in the same house, and of the same distemper. And then we were easy again for about six weeks, when none having died with any marks of infection, it was said the distemper was gone; but after that, I think it was about the 12th of February, another died in another house, but in the same parish and in the same manner.

This turned the people's eyes pretty much towards that end of the town, and the weekly bills showing an increase of burials in St Giles' parish more than usual, it began to be suspected that the plague was among the people at that end of the town, and that many had died of it, though they had taken care to keep it as much from the knowledge of the public as possible. This possessed the heads of the people very much, and few cared to go through Drury Lane, or the other streets suspected, unless they had extraordinary business that obliged them to it... I have observed that the distemper intermitted often at first, so they were, as it were, alarmed and unalarmed again, and this several times, till it began to be familiar to them; and that even when it appeared violent, yet seeing it did not presently spread into the city, or the east and south parts, the people began to take courage,

and to be, as I may say, a little hardened. It is true a vast many people fled, as I have observed, yet they were chiefly from the west end of the town, and from that we call the heart of the city: that is to say, among the wealthiest of the people, and such people as were unencumbered with trades and business. But of the rest, the generality stayed, and seemed to abide the worst; so that in the place we call the Liberties, and in the suburbs, in Southwark, and in the east part, such as Wapping, Ratcliff, Stepney, Rotherhithe, and the like, the people generally stayed, except here and there a few wealthy families, who, as above, did not depend upon their business.

2) Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1947). One of Noonie's favorites after Camus' *Nausea*. It chronicles the abrupt arrival and slow departure of a fictional outbreak of bubonic plague to the Algerian coastal town of Oran in the month of April, sometime in the 1940s. Early in the text are ominous signs:

When leaving his surgery on the morning of April 16, Dr. Bernard Rieux felt something soft under his foot. It was a dead rat lying in the middle of the landing.

... That evening, when Dr. Rieux was standing in the entrance, feeling for the latch-key in his pocket before starting up the stairs to his apartment, he saw a big rat coming toward him from the dark end of the passage. It moved uncertainly, and its fur was sopping wet. The animal stopped and seemed to be trying to get its balance, moved forward again toward the doctor, halted again, then spun round on itself with a little squeal and fell on its side. Its mouth was slightly open and blood was spurting from it....

Richard, however, summing up the situation as he saw it, pointed out that, if the epidemic did not cease spontaneously, it would be necessary to apply the rigorous prophylactic measures laid down in the Code. And, to do this, it would be necessary to admit officially that plague had broken out. But of this there was no absolute certainty; therefore any hasty action was to be deprecated. Rieux stuck to his guns, "The point isn't whether the measures provided for in the Code are rigorous, but whether they are needful to prevent the death of half the population. All the rest is a matter of administrative action, and I needn't remind you that our constitution has provided for such emergencies by empowering prefects to issue the necessary orders." The Prefect assented, "Quite true, but I shall need your professional declaration that the epidemic is one of plague." Rieux replied, "If we don't make that declaration there's risk that half the population may be wiped out."

The epidemic lingers, roiling the lives and minds of the town's inhabitants until the following February, when it leaves as quickly and unaccountably as it came, "slinking back to the obscure lair from which it had stealthily emerged." Can't check them out from our library as it has closed its covers for the duration of the Governor's "non-essential

businesses" restrictions. Miss going there, a place with a high "Casual-Meet Quotient". At 75, it takes spine to "accidently get" someone in the stacks and under covers.

I do further research: citations from Ling Ma's fictional *Severance*, wherein Shen Fever slowly obliterates global civilization; the flu epidemic of 1918 that killed 700,000 Americans, 7 million world-wide; dire facts about the dreaded bubonic plague:

In the 14th century, the bubonic plague, also known as the "Black Death" killed almost a third of the people on the continent of Europe. When it rampaged through London in 1656 and 1657, it killed nearly a quarter of the population. In case you didn't know, the bubonic plague still exists today [my emphasis], not only in pockets of Asia and Africa, but in the American Southwest [I do a double take at this info]. It's transmitted by fleas from infected rodents, and causes high fever, vomiting and painful swellings called "buboes" (hence the name "bubonic"). Even when treated with antibiotics it has a death rate of 10 percent; and if untreated, up to 90 percent. Coronavirus is not remotely like that.

What makes all this data bite at me (naw, naw it can't be true!) is that I am sitting here alone. I no longer have Noonie to bounce ideas off of, to make me laugh, to support me when I feel down. So I wake up my mutts. Address them in baby talk. The scottie in particular seems to read me, tilts his magnificent head with its well-defined snout (American poet/author Gary Lutz calls book spines "snouts") aimed directly at me. General Patton said he dreaded the thought of a bullet aimed, coming, directly at his nose. I adore my dog's nose aimed directly at my heart.

I go back to my iPad, pull up an array of photos I took of Noonie over the years (a few pornographic, which, if someone were to click on them without entering the secret code, would as in the *Mission Impossible* TV's show's sound-recorded secret assignment, vanish in a puff of digital smoke. (So grandkids, be forewarned!)

Ah, here's a photo of him with his newly published novel in which Noonie describes his protagonist (modeled on himself) as: "An ectomorph, a creature so slender as to have almost nothing between his nerve endings and the outside world; an introvert whose primary concern is with mental events. Not a good mixer either; a worse leader." This *dopplegäanger* of Noonie's confesses:

Disappointment, nerve squalls, started early for me. As a child I could never be contented in a place unless I knew the names of the places surrounding that place. Nocturnal enuresis [bed-wetting] up to age five labeled me odd. By my early twenties, I knew life was no featherbed for the repose of sluggards. How the world was managed and why it was created my teen-self could not tell. In high school, I decided to combine passion and scholarship (by thumbing and underlining books). Aut vincere aut mori became my teenage motto —"Win or Die" — a motto inscribed on the front of my school notebook. But fellow classmates had the feeling

I was too much for them — a creature from another planet or the depths of the seas, my tentacles out for observations, ready to respond — so I learned to scale myself down to their size, to be approachable. Looking back, I think this desire to both learn and to discount it was my reaction to my father's dour Church dogma. I later understood it was a steadying balance for his careening moods, a quest for a world without too many differences, a world that was no laughing matter (there aren't any frescoes or paintings of a laughing Christ). I learned in a college class taught by a hefty man in an unstylishly wide tie that "a totalitarian state is a state of canned laughter; that no empire can justify even breaking a child's doll" — life as a perpetual TV sit-com — which we are now asymptotically approaching.

This "fictional" confession reveals much about my dead husband.

* *



My youthful (highschool) redhaired profile in courage.



I know some of you Readers are still asking *why* did I come here? So many miles away from ChiTown where I was born, went to my highschool prom, college, married, kids, set up my practice, and never permanently left. Sure, I already told you my family deserted that city by choice or by sad fate. Now I just lost my 2nd husband of 20 years after having nested with him in The Village of Oak Park (10 miles west of Chicago's Loop).

Yet there is more to my story, When attending that aforementioned Creativity and Madness Conference in Santa Fe 3 years ago with Noonie, we saw in each other's eyes the desire to live here. I felt an obligation to come here permanently after his demise. Maybe I felt I could keep the best of him in my heart if I returned here, lived where we'd had bliss: a meeting of the minds in a weeklong conference of stimulating presentations, a sharing of our taste buds at fine restaurants, of singular sights in nature and art museums, new cultures to learn about, an appreciation of the sheer *duration* of this place (the oldest capital in the U.S.) in world history.

Yes, it's a challenge to my courage. Now I have to homemake all over again, caught in a dialectic of *Umwelt / Innenwelt*

(outer / inner), trying to find my place in a new place, my Southwestern *Lebenswelt*. My German? Just a smidgen (like Noonie), enough to grok Freud and Heidegger, get that guttural pronunciation down of key psychoanalytic terms. It's not my favorite language — guess why? Ironically, within 6 months of my arrival in this high desert town surrounded by mountains with sweet names — Sandia, Jemez, Sangre de Cristo — another Holocaust. A deadly, but invisible, Beast haunting society just when the Immanent Baboon helms the

Ship of State. The Baboon who thinks that by raising his hand over the desolate earth (recall the opening ape scene in 2001: A Space Odyssey) and tracing a dollar sign, he can restore America's Greatness.

In this *Lebenswelt*, courageous Picky goes hunting, despite Noonie still haunting, while trying to establish what the Danish call *hygge* in the home. Home is home-made, but only by reconstructing the home-maker can we hope to transform his all-too-human vale of tears into a scene of intelligence, love, and realistic acceptance. We have to keep in mind that although "things fall apart," the pieces that remain are akin to those of a kaleidoscope: not only beautifully tinted and renewing themselves into new wholes, crystalline flowers, but which are strictly contained at the end of the tube.



* *

I am watching for a glamorous sentence to appear from nowhere — not like that awful one I used in my 1st college-age short story: *The whole month of June smelled like sweat-stained sheets and Oreos* — as I start preparing my dinner, another solitary one, by peeling potatoes. If I was the Japanese poet Bash , that simple activity might be inspiration for a haiku: *A peeled potato plops into a pan of water* . . . with its 3 lines, 17 syllables, 5/7/5 syllable count. I've always loved the sound (and word) — *PLOP*.

In this, a small kitchen, the sound echoes, better, rebounds like a tennis ball — that sound, that sound which I recall from the tense moments of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, you know, the scene toward the end of the film where Guy plays a frantic game of back 'n forth tennis at Forest Hills stadium, waiting to sneak away from the event, rushing



Hers.

her students).

to get the key clue, Bruno's lighter, that will prove Bruno is the real murderer. "Doubling, crisscross, and doublecross are the master codes of that film," Noonie told me one night after we watched that movie on AMC for the nth time, crossing his eyes, enjoying a pleasurable pedantic moment. I later found on e-Bay a red lobster-claw tie tack, as close as could get to the lobster-claw tie worn by Bruno on the train in the film's famous opening scenes. Scored big points on that one. Crisscross. The following year, Noonie got me in Santa Fe a lobster brooch at a jewelers in the La Fonda Hotel. So we matched, sort of.

Dinner prepared, I put an old Ravi Shankar tape in my boom-box. Start to eat. It brings to mind another kind of PLOP — er — FLOP. My college roommate, Polly, sighing, told me of a very cute guy, Sterling his 1st name, who sat next to her in her Poli Sci class (she went on to teach that subject in college much to the chagrin of

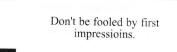
Long story, short, Sterling and I nervously walk over to Mandel Hall for a campus event, Ravi Shankar in concert. I wear a STOP THE WAR button on my orange sweater, he a GO BEARS on his kelley green blazer. Not good. He's not sure he should hold my hand. The doors open and we make for our seats. He waits for me to be seated before he takes his. After he tells me he's in Army ROTC my face must have registered horror. From thereon, he loses all will to initiate conversation. I have to probe him with questions as if I was giving him polygraph. Awkward 10 minutes. Finally, the curtain rises to a scene of sparseness, only Ravi and accompanying musicians in their traditional garb. After 15 minutes of listening to this master of the sitar play, my date cautiously leans over and queries, "When is he going to finish tuning up?"



No surprise it was my last date with him. Sterling was permanently tarnished in my sobbing eyes. I rebuked Polly, graphed out with my hands the awful diverting lines of our evening's conversation. "The horror, the horror!" gasps out Kurtz (Marlon Brando) in Francis Ford Coppola's Viet Nam era riff on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. I anticipate similar hearts of darkness scenarios now that my high heels are back on the trail of lasting love. Which reminds me I have sorry, elder-defeated, not-fit for Santa Fe trails, feet. So, please,

understand I speak figuratively here. The only feet I got going for me are in the stanzas of

the funny love poetry I wrote for Noonie over the years celebrating his birthday, our engagement, our marriage, our anniversary, the 1st muskie he landed.



I have this thing for snacking. Sugar and carbohydrates. So no surprise that for dessert tonight I open the last of the fortune cookies included in my Lu Lu Chinese meal from the other day.

Wow! Talk about a fortuitous roll of the

cosmic dice. Staring me in the face is a reminder of what Polly later informed me of: after graduation GO BEARS Sterling became a Green Beret officer in 'Nam and died a hero to his squad when he dived on a grenade, saving many of his soldiers. "There is a plaque in the university's gym honoring his sacrifice," Polly said, sighing. A terrible swoon comes down on me, for a moment Sterling descends all the way through me, a nausea for his absence, a life cut short. Then the cookie's sugar hits my blood stream and I recover.

In my youthful stupidity I had imagined the future, years rolling out like the tide, where Sterling lies in bed, fat, old weather on his face, posture crushed, hard lines on his jaw, despising the words "relationship" and "partner," his bedroom curtains drawn so no one



can see him drinking whiskey and taking pills, his days spent watching old replays of famous football matches, longing for the glory days of Tab Hunter and Natalie Wood, on the edge of the world, peeking into another.

Honorable Confucian lesson: *Picky, on your very picky hunt for another beau, maybe you should be careful not to be fooled by first impressions.* I would add though, as Milan Kundera vouched for: *It is because a person has a sense of humor that we feel we can trust them.* From minute 1 of our meeting, Noonie displayed such.

: *

It's 10 p.m. I am so bored with the KOAT news coverage tonight. Same old, same old. If I hear the word "antibodies" one more time, I'm going to do something anti-body to anybody.



Large-eyes news anchor (after watching her every day, I can vouch that she knows 50 ways to tie a scarf) tells me that Sturgill Simpson has tested positive for COVID. Who the hell is Sturgill Simpson? I discover he's country music singer and was in the movie *The Dead Don't Die*. Well, if that means "Noonie ain't dead," there is some truth in it. You, Noonie, walk through my mind when I initially crawl into



bed and when I crawl out in the a.m. I believe you were not suicidal. I now must also believe that writing about you isn't a way my unconscious has of killing you. No you didn't kill yourself. After all, you didn't quit teaching (a sure sign of collapse), albeit, you once confessed confronting the overly-sensitive "new student" was heap demoralizing and did rub shoulders with one of your fellow adjuncts, recently fired for "creating an unsafe classroom environment, outside the school begging for change, wear-

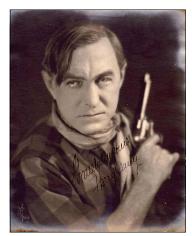
ing a T-shirt declaiming: I ONCE WAS SOMEBODY.

But you, *you* weren't in chronic physical pain, having conquered your lower back trouble by daily Aleve dosages and exercise (you practically lived at the local gym). You were reading a lot, too. You had *me*. The dogs. You had a book in progress. Yes, that text did suggest a modicum of existential angst. From the opening chapter of *Finding Mememo*:

I find myself in a random spacetime intermediary point of a phase of the universe, alive in a room with my lost muscular license of youth, on my way to becoming an intransitive verb — prefigured by my avatar in the video game Passage being suddenly replaced by the iconic tombstone — recovering from a microquake of a sour minute in a difficult afternoon. Had I been on a slow planet where the year was much slower, I'd be younger. I put in Bill Evans' CD Conversations with Myself — myself, blood and breath, an inner island I spend time reconnoitering and fortifying. Blood and breath give — when one or both begin to go south — this old bone-clock a taste of death, a THINK. I think what? Therefore, I am, what? A man who starts from zero? Factor in, I believe, the cosmic Control Room's run by robotic rabbits moving to canned laughter, using code that is ideology, creating our ready-made reality. I feel equally algorithmic, ephemeral, and narcissistic. We need a Universal Center for the Salvage of Imagination in Imminent Danger of Destruction (UCSIIDD), unless you want to be buried alive in a Neo-con escape coffin. Do you just want an unending series of peak experiences — punch and glitz, sensation, and impact — so as to escape the consequences of living in time, of being over-controlled? Or do you join UNICEF, fight famine? Join the Communist Party, fight Capitalism? Yet, as one wit put it, "If you're part of the solution, you're part of the problem." So do you sign up for eschatological disappointment counseling, or just keep cool, blank, impassive? Or what? Just wish gone?

But despite these words from his protagonist, Hy Grader, no, it wasn't PTSDinduced despair as Yersinia Pestis argues (nay, hoped it was, for the sake of her damn book). Okay, I did peruse it, hastily, her book. That is.

Noonie once told me, after the Buzz Cafe espresso loosened his tongue, that "If it wasn't for the option to perform *harikari*, I couldn't go on."



Noonie's found photo of Harry Carey, Sr.



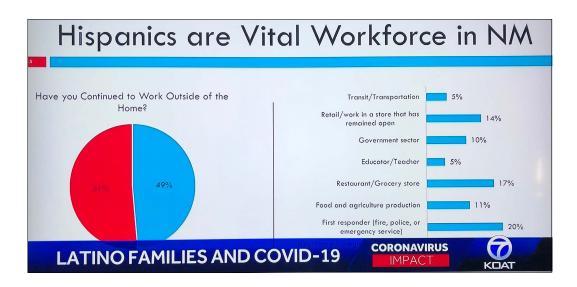
May I add a silly factoid here? It tells you much about Noonie's sense of weird association. He found it funny, and oddly appropriate, that the famous silent screen actor Harry Carey had a name sounding like *seppuku* selfdestruction and had died in 1947, the very year he himself was born. Was he hinting at reincarnation? Noonie was a crack shot after all. He had found the flick in a store on Hollywood Blvd in L.A. a rare signed publicity photo of the actor wielding a pistol ("Yippee-ki-yay, motherfucker!") in one of his western films.

Paradoxically, the thought of suicide sustained Noonie's life force. Besides, being a Cheese Head born in Wisconsin, he was always in the mood to read Camus, garner advice from the master of mastering the Absurd ("There is scarcely any passion without struggle") and juggle joyously even the most absurd aspects of life.

No, I suspect a coterie of evil academics, a pair of Talking Claws scuttling across the noisy, crowded floor of the Cliff Dwellers Club toward Noonie on the balcony,

were intent on opening up a new position for a younger academic who had *mucho* digital distance-learning skills and could be paid less. There! See how isolation makes the muddled mind rush to the antipodes of rigorous reason. (And Buddhist monk Tenzin Palmo lived 12 years in a remote Himalayan cave!) Conspiracy theories. Aldous Huxley's Heaven *and* Hell of the mind, with my musings being a descent into Hell — just for the hell of it.

The following is no conspiracy, the virus's claws are real; the stats are real:



COVID-SAFE PRACTICES FOR ALL NEW MEXICANS

- Stay home: Avoid unnecessary travel, and always stay at home when you are sick (except for medical emergencies)
- Wash hands frequently
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- Watch for symptoms of COVID-19: Fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat and/or loss of taste or smell
- If you must go out:
 - Wear a multilayer cloth face covering in public settings
 - Maintain a 6 foot distance from others
 - Avoid gatherings
 - Protect vulnerable populations by finding ways to connect without face-to-face contact



LIVE



Here's incoming data as seen on my humongous LCD TV, I see just after I put down a romance novel whose love scenes — despite the panpipes and tambourines — seem to take place between cardboard figures.

* * *

4.0



Strike! Occupy! Retweet! Protesters with guns at an anti-lockdown rally.

In war, fear is noisy. I remember the noise in the streets, on campus, during the height of the Viet Nam war. Here fear it takes the form of eerie silence. I daily walk the dogs around Aldea, with its spectacular views. No one is seen or heard. This is because, unlike some parts of our Divided States of America, New Mexicans are par-

taking of a much vaunted South Africa value, *ubuntu*: "I am because you are," avoiding crowds, wearing face masks, being genial towards others. Not standing outside government buildings machine guns slung over their shoulders. The fear and noise *is* coming from those a war with the government, whether federal or state. We are turning into a nation of FIST PEOPLE versus WORD PEOPLE. Our belief in Individualism refracted through our increasing rampant Nationalism, such that any *social* consequences for many of these types of people is moot. Ah, Ayn Rand again. How "blessed" has been her influence!

But I must also remember people are protesting the lack of the usual pleasures of life: the company of friends, the pleasures of a beach on a hot day, a work of art in a museum, enjoying being in a crowd at an event, like a "Take me out to the ball game" baseball match, or drinking steins of beer at a crowded bar while cheering on one's team playing on the field of an oversized screen. Gambling's thrill is enhanced when in a crowd of fellow dice rollers. Even for those professional "skaters", singular people with ice in their veins and total muscle control at the craps table. Even if one could, I can't imagine someone would go to 1 the many Indian-owned casinos about here if they thought they we be 1 of, say, 3 other gamblers. Crowds. Where we can cease to be rational, realistic, and responsible — unfortunately, 3 aspects of human behavior that The Reign of COVID XIX demand we cultivate for survival's sake — and enjoy a kind of crowd drunkenness. Crowd-consciousness and COVID-consciousness are antithetical. You see it on TV every night.

We are creatures in need of crowd presence — albeit, Noonie got anxiety attacks in crowds — a rudimentary, but necessary pleasure for us. Even for unicellular creatures are drawn to nourishment, seek company, avoid other things. There seems to be a very deep primal pleasure/displeasure binary at work here. We could — ha, ha — ask a Scientologist to regress us to our unicellular lives in the remotest geological past, find out for ourselves if that's a fact. It does seem to be in our DNA. So let's have some mercy on these eager-to-

be released-from-the gate runners of the human race, despite the nauseous politics that motivate (rationalize?) it.

When I do meet someone on my walking circumnavigation of our small community, I find myself gyrating about very slowly to signal my intent to cross the street to avoid contact. This not the usual response. Ordinarily, I make a bee-line for their company, chat, show off my dogs. If my interlocutor is an unaccompanied man, make subtle inquiries. Now gyrating about, I must look like the people here who come out to the front of their homes and do Tai Chi moves as the sun rises in the East. Eastern mysticism or Indigenous spiritual practices go over BIG here, or a combination thereof (New Age).

Inside people's (now more crowded) homes, everything is a frenzy of information these days as given on CNN, MSNBC, KOAT, blogs, tweets, and other multifarious digital bleats, like Facebook. Today, I read a family's COVID posting. I take it as typical of these stressful days:

KERHONKSON, NEW YORK, MARCH 24 — today we're locked in our apartment and mad. If, like me, you have a spouse and kids and a dog, any space or time to think will be hard to come by. Still, we are lucky the only arguments we have are with relatives over FaceTime about them really staying inside for the duration. Weird how you stare at your own face while facing someone else. I become too selfconscious of my own emotional responses when doing this self-monitoring.

If I'd had Facebook during the 1950s polio pandemic, I would've posted something like this:

TODAY, I lined up once for the Sabin vaccine given on a sugar cube — YUM! — then tried to return again in line for another cube. I, unsuccessfully, tried to avoid the other (less sweet) Salk shot-in-the-arm vaccine. OUCH!"

Had I had a Web 2.0 in my life back then, my faculty for observation and attention would by now probably be considerably sanded down to a mere smidgen of its former self. *Starting* to read would be harder for me, of course. Worse, today, I'd hardly notice that love looks like a sequence of pink and red heart emojis, and friendship expressed through tweets and 'grams. Metaphysical poetry has no greater role than its application to a bicep. Today, it is not about knowing and not knowing, but knowing and being able to say that you know. Shit.

Oh, but I am rambling again. A kind of paralysis of the mind. So back to "I am lonely." So, I *am* writing. *Not for nothing* — I like that phrase. Not for nothing id (a Freudian slip, I always screw up *did* by writing *id*) did Henry James say anyone who wanted to be a writer had to inscribe on their banner 1 word: LONELINESS. Loneliness. Is this why I now find I can finally sit down and write after years of a writer's block the size of the 'berg that sunk the unsinkable Titanic?

Prior to Noonie's demise and our current Social Isolation, I couldn't put pen to paper, or old fingers to my keyboard, or fingertips to an iPhone long enough, sustained enough, to put my complicated thoughts down. Might that be because, as author Czesław Miłosz noted, "When a writer is born into a family, the family is finished." I am terrified of that, why I am discrete re: family matters, why I FaceTime my grandkids often.



Now I can. Can write. I am running through a hell of a lot of paper though, reams of it, even as my fellow lockdowns cautiously venture out in masks to hoard paper towels, Kleenex, and toilet paper. You see, I have to see my words on paper, not just the fugitive pixels on an LCD screen. Hard copy. Substance. I am Old School, proud of it.

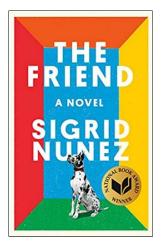
"I'm cold stonied, muddled, and beat," said a dying peasant to a curious Sir James Fitzjames Stephen in 1862. Sounds like me right now locked in, fearing that viral predator that attacks the weak and vulnerable (like me). That peasant probably could have added "I'm covered in dust," but that was assumed back then. I find I am covered with a thin, microlayer of dust, so long have I sat here. The gusting desert March winds (there are some 400 names for wind in Lyall Watson's *Heaven's Breath*, but in Hopi, these New Mexican winds are named *Isumúya*, "Whispering Noises of Breezes") blow a soft dust onto everything.

I put down my iPad and click on the TV (both screens dusted with dust). The dogs are like statues come to life, my scottie pointing his large black snout directly at a BBC news anchor with a Scottish accent who is making the usual patriotic reference to WWII, employing a nostalgic tone of voice. Bouncing back-and-forth between NOW and THEN, he mentions Britain's infamous "Great Toilet Paper Shortage of 1944". Shit.

The *thing* (that complex of electric impulses drawn from innumerable sensory sources) that passes through my *mind* (that emergent phenomenon) before I nod off before the Tube (not accurate today, it is no longer a tube) is this COVID \$64,000 QUESTION. One that, before I nod off, I'd like to pose to that National Town Hall concerning the virus:

What are the mass shooters doing now that schools, shopping centers, music venues, bars, bowling alleys, fast food restaurants, children's parks, churches and synagogues are closed? Can these powder kegs hold in their explosive forces long enough to wait-out the pandemic? If not, what?

* *



"What a load of crap, this notion of making the university a safe place . . . if the top priority had been to make everyone feel *safe*. Who'd want to live in such a world?" I read in *The Friend* by Sigrid Nunez, a hard-to-put-down book sent to me by a mutual friend of Noonie and me; he inscribed it thus: "For Picky, her new-found passion for writing and her everlasting love of dogs expressed in her adoring adage 'More puppies!'."

I think of all the astonishing things in life, all the great things that would never have been created, all the imaginings that wouldn't have surfaced, things left undiscovered, if society had placed *safety* above all else. I went to college, specifically to the University of Chicago, precisely to be taken out of my

comfort zone. To be exposed to images and ideas that rocked my consciousness. To meet people from all over the world (like Noonie was, I am a Citizen of the World, not a nationalist). To place myself in dangerous intellectual and political waters, in possible conflict with strongly differing personalities. In short, to evolve into an *adult*.

From what Noonie told me about his school's attempts to mollycoddle the students, to encourage high-grading to get high student retention. I could only shiver, thinking how the educational system now takes over parental roles, extending the childhood phase of young people way into their 20s. I think, many of these kids will never grow up, having 1 hand held by their "helicopter" parents, the other by school admin-types. Never learn to handle conflict. Never given a chance to be challenged by uncomfortable ideas. Expect to be catered to. Expect that if they paid to attend a course, they have the right to demand a passing grade. Now this is reprehensible enough in a liberal education, but even worse, as in Noonie's context, where the students are ART students, who should be pushed out of their comfort zones, promoting original thought, challenging the status quo. Learn to stand on their own 2 feet in the face of opposition. Defend themselves.

Yes, it is obvious Noonie and I spent many an hour discussing this contentious issue, sipping Amontillado in brandy snifters. Its dry and intense flavor adapts to difficult and risky pairings (like intense amorous relationships, or teacher-student relations). Specifically, LUSTAU AMONTILLADO 'LOS ARCOS' brand sherry. Why that specific sherry? Poe. *The Cask of Amontillado*, specifically. More specifically, a story set in Italy during the carnival season (akin to our Mardi Gras). Even more specific than that, the bulk of the plot takes place in the vaults, cellar, or catacombs beneath the home of Montressor,



Storyboard illustration for *The Cask of Amont-illado*. Montressor walling in Fortunato in his dank wine cellar.

the story's main character and narrator. Specifically, a revenge plot against one Fortunato (well-named, Edgar!) who'd offended Montressor (Noonie called him "My Professor"), a chilly revenge best served up cold in a cold, damp cellar. The thought of being buried alive, walled up to starve to death in total isolation, maybe even suffocate, made for chilly reading for both us as we had this thing — specifically, an Orwellian "Room 101" thing — about suffering such a death. Isolation. Suffocation. What COVID XIX offers his victims as a reward for his presence. But how have *we* offended Signore

Virus, specifically? By our: Greed? Pride? Stupidity? Maybe he's just joining hands with Gaia, the primal Mother Earth goddess, to reduce the number of warm human bodies across the globe to a specific number, balancing the *homo sapiens*-to-other species ratio for the sake of the planet.

* *



Trumping Trump Triptych (2020) Picky Hunting (center image shows Noonie in 2016 training on his inflatable Trump).

Greed, pride, stupidity (GPS). That's how we locate Trump. Let's vector in on what he said back in late March:

Many people have it. I just spoke to two people. They had it. They never went to a doctor. They never went to anything. They didn't even report it.... The people that actually die, that percentage is much lower than I actually thought.... The mortality rate, in my opinion, ... it's way, way down.

We call it "whistling past the graveyard". Such indifference is odd, since in *How to Get Rich* (2004) Trump confessed his germaphobia:

As you may have heard, I don't like germs. I'm still waging a personal crusade to replace the mandatory and unsanitary handshake with the Japanese custom of bowing.

But must we bow to the Immanent Baboon's blatant falsehoods? To his and his cronies paranoid claims that unessential services closures were "totalitarian impulses" (Andrew Napolitano). In early March, Trump retweeted pro-Trump author Charlie Kirk's assertion: "Democrats and the mainstream media are trying to incite panic over the Coronavirus." A few weeks later, Trump himself tweeted: "The LameStream Media is the dominant force in trying to get me to keep our Country closed as long as possible in the hope that it will be detrimental to my election success. The real people want to get back to work ASAP." I'd be "A SAP" if I believed this crap. We've seen the result in terms of people's protests, weapons-in-hand, against quarantine ordinances, resulting in more deaths.



Pence visits staff at Mayo Clinic sans mask.

More stupidity. Vice President Pence refuses to wear a mask, even when visiting hospital wards — NO MASK! — giving silent assent to the EverTrumpers: "See? There's nuttin' ta crak 'bout, folks. I don't take this shit seriously. And, ain't it better left in God's hands?" I wonder if God washes his hands. Both leaders have

become vectors for the virus. This is made worse by the fact that many who feed on the shit the Immanent Baboon gives forth, tend to be in the higher risk category due to poor healthcare, chronic underlying illness.

Paranoia ("The world is at war with a hidden enemy") and risk ("freedom involves risk" — 2 horses the Republican party has managed to straddle bareback and ride, up to now. On the 1 hand, fear of invasion, of subversion, of contamination (The Wall); on the other, risky casino capitalism for whom safety (regulation) is *verboten*.



The morning news coverage today.

Trump is now up against COVID XIX, where this rodeo trick can only put him and supporters flat on their asses in the dirt. So they play it down. The net effect, ironically, will be Republican voters in the election, not just the loss of those Trump has dubbed "haters and losers." Never has the inhumanity of what is essentially American Fascism been made clearer. Despite my sorrow, part of

me is glad Noonie didn't live long enough to experience this moment in history in which a human being can say, "To me germs are just another negativity" suffered by "losers." COVID XIX deigns to separate the wheat from the chaff. Trump's buddy, macho Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, told his people: We're going to tackle the virus but tackle it like fucking men."

I sit here holding a warm Luisa's Cafe mug of homemade chocolate latte, moving my hands over its smooth surface as if washing them. Watching all this play out on the morning news, still relatively safe. Its "We all have to act" then "There's nothing to worry about here." Crazy-making. *Am I going crazy? Am I hearing what I hear? Seeing what I'm seeing? This can't be...* I am about to put wiping fingers to eyes in disbelief, but stop. *Better wash my hands first.* I should, for the sake of this book, be counting how many times I wash my hands. But I'm too scattered now.

I stand up before you and declaim: MY NAME IS PICKY AND I AM A GERMAPHOBE. I am addicted to my favorite cocktail: 2 parts Lysol with 4 parts Clorox, 1 part 409, with a spritz of Windex, topped with a slice of lime. It is the *only* thing I have in common with Trump. Before the pandemic, I washed my hands often. Now — over the



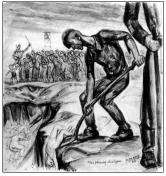
last month and a half — the number might just match the amount in my savings account. My hands are turning into sandpaper. It will be uncomfortable for me to pick up pen and write a check to pay my steadily rising water bill which is due soon, which I keep putting off, and off, and off. Noonie said I could found my own nation — Procrastination — with its national flag asking someone else to create it's look. See, it is harder than I've let on for me to daily slog at this record of my adventures (or lack thereof) during the reign of COVID XIX.



I asked Alexa on my iPad what the weather was going to be today (the 75th anniversary of Hitler's suicide). The answer: "What do you care, you aren't going anywhere today."

KOAT informs me today that Jared Kushner called the Trump administration's response to the Reign of COVID XIX: "A great success" despite the 60,000 already

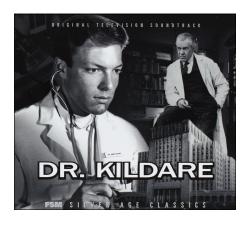
dead, more to come. Am I crazy? It seems that television images, those source images of daily life, before the pandemic tended to ratchet up the volume of brighter colors and



Sonderkommando in Auschwitz.

sharper edges. Now the dial appears to be turned in the other direction, a world painted in plaintive grays with a certain subaqueous wobble as if German artist Gerhard Richter was the art director for all those iPhone vid clips shot inside ICUs. Richter is noted for a 4-part work of large-format paintings for which Richter used as his models authentic photographs secretly taken in 1944 by Jewish prisoners in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. When I look at these disturbing views inside hospitals fast turning into sites of mass death, I find I am simultaneously looking and look-

ing away. Looking because some of these images speak of Andre Breton's surrealist doctrine (by way of the Comte de Lautréamont) of objective chance: "as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table." Looking away because my emotional hypervigilance makes these televised insights into other people's nightmares hard to stomach. I am using more Xanax than usual these days.



Noonie, were he still with me, would've *hated* these daily televisual intrusions into hospital environments. As a teen, he couldn't stomach the popular hospital TV shows: "Marcus Welby", "The Doctors", "Dr. Kildare", "Medical Center", "Ben Casey", "The Eleventh Hour", "The Nurses", "Breaking Point", and "Medic". Even, as an adult, he ran into the movie theater lobby during the surgery scene, shot with a fish-eye lens, in John Frankenheimer's film *Seconds* (Banker Arthur Hamilton gets a call from a friend he

thought was dead. The friend is *not* a ghost, but was situated into a new existence by a company who can give you a completely new face and life. Hamilton decides to undergo the necessary cosmetic surgery to transition from his current miserable life.

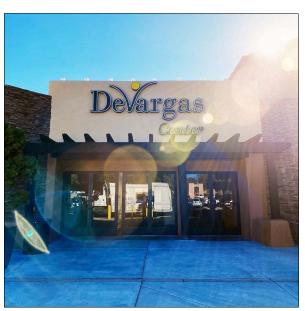
He admitted this phobia had to do with his own hospitalization for a tonsillectomy



when in kindergarten. He told me he vividly recalled the smell of ether, all the white gowns around him; still hearing the plaintive calls "Doctor! Doctor!" echoing down a hospital corridor from a scared little boy abandoned in a wheelchair alone (in other tellings, Noonie described a girl in a tubular polio breathing machine); his own waking up alone in a recovery room, no parents waiting, the days of throat pain afterward. HIPTSD (hospital-induced post-traumatic syn-

drome), I diagnosed. I can't imagine the Noonie's terror if he caught the virus and ended up in the suffocating confines of an ICU at our Presbyterian Hospital here in Santa Fe.

But Noonie's memory, my memory of Noonie's memory, is really a form of storytelling that goes on continuously in the mind and often changes with each telling. Writer and vaunted editor William Maxwell (d. 2000) has said about our persistent recollections: "The story always changes with the telling. Uncertainty is truth." Ah, Midwest Maxwell. The most noteworthy and comforting Maxwell quote I remember pops up every time I reach for a Xanax: "Who knows what oversensitive is, considering all there is to be sensitive to."



The sun, that "pure light" of New Mexico, was evident today.

Another perfect New Mexican spring day. I go to the DeVargas mall to use the mailbox there. I have an envelope too large for our Aldea out-going mail slot's mouth. It only eats tapas-sized envelopes. That large blue mailbox with its big mouth sits, appropriately, next to the popular Atrisco Café. It's closed for seating, of course, but I hope to get take-out. Chalupas, to be exact: 2 crispy corn tortillas topped with refried beans, melted cheese, lettuce, tomato, and guacamole, salsa and sour cream on the side. Disappointment. A crude-rendered sign directs me to their parent restaurant,

Tomasita's, in the Railyard art district next to the Rail Runner train station. I know that place of pilgrimage for serious seekers of excellent Northern Mexican cuisine (especially the sopapillas) in Santa Fe County will have a long line (an hour at best) of unmasked, non social-distancing devotees. Unsafe, so I simply pop some change into the metal box holding a stack of the latest edition of our local newspaper, *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, and return home over scenic, winding Buckman Road, with its many speed humps and Ford 4x4 trucks that love to smell my car's ass, then pass me and dump their exhaust on "Lexstacy", my reddish-chocolate colored Lexus SUV. Too those truck owner's I'm the Anglo resident mucking up *their* Spanish lands, forgetting *their* ancestor's mucked up Indigenous lands, leaving the Indians with their pottery and home-made crafts as tourist attractions.

Spooning soup in to my mouth I peruse the paper. Notice there is a new section. It features an ongoing debate "In or Out?" between readers writing in to support the lockdown and those demanding to open up for business. The section ends with a list of summons police have given for violating COVID-19 ordinances. A sample case:

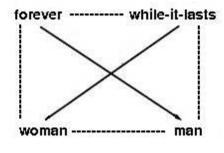
Defendant accused of disregarding safe-distancing: speaking to two other people in proximity behind a lamppost. The judge reads this violation to the accused, who responds; "Can you tell me, Your Honor, where behind a lamppost is?" Case dismissed.

In the "Letters to Editor" (my favorite section) a rather testy Santa Fean author complains of a literary review posted a week earlier by a don who teaches Nineteenth Century Lit (my preferred period, too) at UNM:

Professor Paul Hasleman's review of my new novel applies to literary history the techniques of agronomy: for any given novelist, in any given country, he studies soil chemistry, topography, and climate, then treats a generation of writers like a crop of mushrooms, chiles, beets, and Brussel sprouts....

For a moment — only a moment — I wonder if this UNM faculty member is bearded, wears a tweed sport coat with leather patches on the elbows, carries a squat bulldog pipe in his shirt pocket, but never smokes it, and is single: *What catches my attention is that his name is identical to the 12 year old boy slowly losing his marbles in Conrad Aiken's short story "Silent Snow, Secret Snow". Maybe he'd like an English major who also likes to garden. I could send him a copy of Noonie's poetic description of my Oak Park garden as a lure. But no, that'd do the opposite. Can't be making him think I am still mourning my deceased husband whose definition of love, copped from Rilke, was: two solitudes that protect and border and greet each other. Even if it's true I am still stuck on Noonie, can't make that too obvious to a new date.*

I form an image in my mind of Greimas' Structuralist semiotic square (much beloved by Noonie) that captures the essential key elements at play in the battle of the sexes:



* *





Scene from "Monk": Mr. Monk Fights City Hall (2009)



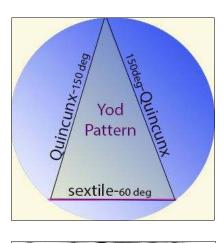
My Aldea mail slot 2 blocks from my house.

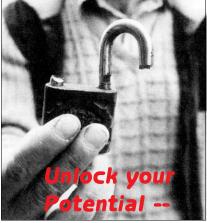
Desire. Adulterous relationships. Jealousy. All part of the mystery stew served up in the British crime TV show "Inspector Morse". My Prime TV cable offers me hours of distraction. I usually watch a 2-hour "Morse" then follow it up with an hour of "Monk". Good British-American relations are practiced in this house.

The former features John Thaw as an opera-loving (like me), boozy detective always immersed in Shakespearean plots. The latter stars Tony Shalhoub as Adrian Monk, an obsessive genius who, after the unsolved murder of his wife, develops obsessive-compulsive disorder (like me), which includes his terror of germs and contamination. His condition costs him his job as a prominent homicide detective in the San Francisco Police Department, but he continues to solve crimes.

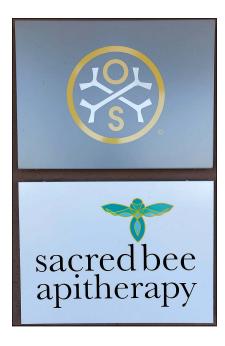
Tonight, thanks to the tedium of the Governor's lockdown, I am ready for my double-feature; 1st a "Morse" episode titled "The Secret of Bay 5B". Looking it up on my iPad, that season 3, episode 4 initially aired in January 1990. It begins with a man being killed in a parking garage, specifically in bay 5B. I find that curious as my mailbox here in Aldea is 5B. Odd coincidence.

After munching on a bowl of hotaired popped popcorn, during which the murderer is caught, I switch to a February 2009 episode of "Monk", "Mr. Monk Fights City Hall", wherein Adrian is desperate to save from demolition the parking garage where his wife Trudy was killed in a car bombing. In this episode viewers find out that Trudy's car was parked in slot 5B!





A poster that hung in my Chicago office, now hanging in my current office. My natal Yod at work.

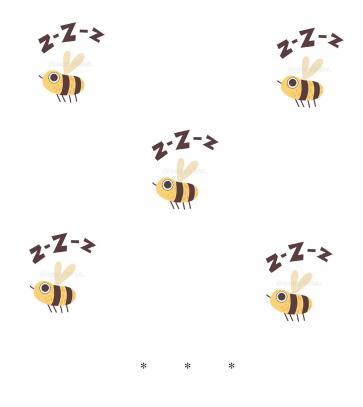


If Noonie was sitting here with me, he'd go nuts. Mention that the earlier, original use of parking slot 5B in "Morse" was appropriated, riffed on later by the producers of "Monk". After having worked in the film industry, Noonie knew it was common practice to include such allusions to other films and TV shows. "A form of homage. A cult form of knowledge," as he put it. Ergo, the use of 5B in 2 crime shows had a rational basis. But what about me having inherited a 5B mail slot from the previous house owner? I laugh. What was this roll of the "comic dice" supposed to mean? Is there an actual secret to 5B? Can I decode it?

Since I am forced to quarantine, I can't meet face-to-face the few new friends I made here just prior to The Reign of COVID XIX. I can be forgiven if at times my mind descends into obsessive thinking. Now is 1 of those times. I do a "close reading" of the series of 5Bs that buzz in my head: Perhaps 5 plus 5 plus 5 equals 15, standing for the number of years Noonie I've been together; or refer to the fact that 5 days out of 7 the wind Blows, Blows, Blows, Blows, Blows here. Or then it might suggest that any 5 elements may be arranged into a quincunx formation; ergo, one could form 3 quincunxes to form an isosceles triangle, which has to do with Astrology's concept of Yod. [Yod, meaning "Finger of God" is formed by 2 quincunxes, pointing towards the same "fulcrum," a 3rd planet. The 2 planets shooting quincunxes towards the third are linked by a sextile. All within $3^{\circ}/3.5^{\circ}$ orb maximum. The 2 planets sextile form a base, a *strength*. The 3rd planet (fulcrum) receiving all the energy is a *focus*, a purpose; but there is an uneasiness about it, a stress, an anxiety, a restlessness. In order to understand why, one needs to understand the quincunx. The quincunx in itself is extremely stressful, it's not as aggressive as a square, but it isn't less powerful. It's an itchy feeling, feeling inadequate, feeling clumsy, feeling separated and conflicted. Because the 3rd placement is around

opposite the midpoint of the other 3rd, connecting their placements on a single wheel with lines, it creates an isosceles triangle. I daily look up my astrological reading, just for fun.] *For me, astrologically, 5B may indicate that my "natal Yod", a vast reservoir of talent, is moving toward realization, unlocking my full potential. Or maybe it's something outside me, political: 5 Bs: B B B B, standing for Native American empowerment: Big Braves Bash Big Business* [in the 1680 Popé's Rebellion kicked the Spanish colonizers' ass out of the Indians' ancestral lands]; or refers to the natural world, a sign that in the near future, *as spring flowers emerge, I will see 5 bees buzzing about my lavender bush. It can't be a Shakespeare reference as 2B or not 2B doesn't add up to 5. Or it may be prescient, that in 5 days I will go in for apitherapy for my 5 year bout with arthritis at the Sacred Bee Apitherapy clinic in the Aldea Plaza at 5 Nuevo Milenio, a 10 (5 + 5) minute walk from my abode.* [Apitherapy, a branch of alternative medicine, uses honey bee products, including honey, pollen, propolis, royal jelly, and bee venom.] *Significantly, the clinic's logo harbors within a quincunxial array.*

All this. Nonsense? Delusional thought? Probably, But be as it may . . . These 5Bs are quincunxially buzzing in my head even as I place head to pillow.





"Casas de Perros," House of Dogs, our dream retirement home, which since his death has become a shrine to Noonie. "For age is opportunity no less / Than youth itself, though in another dress" — Longfellow.

The skies are enormous, and the detail so precise and exquisite that wherever you are you are isolated in a glowing world between the macro and the micro, where everything is sidewise under you and over you, and the clocks stopped long ago.

— Ansel Adams, letter to Alfred Stieglitz (9/21/1937) re: New Mexico.

5.0



I can't believe it. I am starting chapter 5 — a 5 again. And it's Cinco de Mayo! A big event here, an annual celebration held on May 5th to commemorate the Mexican Army's victory over the French Empire at the Battle of Puebla, on May 5, 1862, under the leadership of General Ignacio Zaragoza. But COVID XIX has declared all festivities be cancelled. So we Santa Feans content ourselves with "the pure light" as long-time residents call it. The pellucid sky. High temperature today will be 78 degrees, wind. I grab a book I just received from Amazon.com, *A Woman Cannot Survive on Books Alone — She Also Need Dogs*. Odd, that grammatical error "need" instead of "needs"" Tear-jerking stories of how canine pets have been essential companions for so many women. I can relate. My dogs park themselves on either side of my chaise longue. The day passes.

Early evening. The sun is going down. I glance up at the sky, in a land whose sun bleaches my hair, whose low humidity cracks my lips, forces me to drink water constantly. Overhead the moon is a narrow crescent, a sliver. Like a scythe. Like the scythe held by The Grim Reaper fast at work during The Reign of COVID XIX. I have never seen the moon in such exquisite definition in the skies of Illinois as I see in Santa Fe. Moreover, the moon seems to *like* being around during the day, not always lurking in the dark.

This land is, indeed, Gateway to the Moon, the title of

my cousin's novel about a young New Mexican man, residing in Santa Fe, unwittingly discovering his roots as a crypto-Jew. The book was another reason my attention was drawn to Santa Fe as a place to retire to. I guarantee it's a good read. She's a gifted watercolorist, too. One of her large abstractions in purple, yellow, red figures the Hopi creation colors and replays sunrise/sunset of a typical New Mexican day. Its multifarious shapes suggest everchanging landscape and sky. It stands on its own, complementing the magnificent changing views outside my bedroom window. I have similar talents in writing and painting, but much diminished compared to Mary's. Thinking of that Secret of Bay 5B, yes, I got to crank up my natal Yod quotient. Unlock my potential in the romantic department, too.

My evening stroll is *sans* mutts. Just for me. To let my mind run its natural course through nature. Let my blue eyes (Noonie adored) run across the horizon of this Land of Enchantment with its Mary Morris colors; with some of its residents strewn across miles and miles of scrub and hills not realizing their ancestry traces back to the Jews in Spain before

they were expelled in 1492 and came to the New World, to what will eventually be after a contentious history, the State of New Mexico.

As darkness descends, I return to my home and dogs. I sit down at my Apple computer (Noonie hated Apple machines, but loved apples) and begin a letter to Melanie, a friend whose name is written on my heart. Yes, a *real* letter, the type you type and mail in a mailbox. She rarely looks at her e-mail. This is a land of extremes, even when it comes of mailboxes. The mailbox at the DeVargas mall is disproportionately wide, a mouth spread to receive strange cargo; the one near my house is much smaller and so narrow vertically, a finger can hardly make its way inside. I begin my missive . . .

May 5th, 2020

Dear Mel,

Cinco de Mayo this year falls on Taco Tuesday, but both are ruined by a virus named after a Mexican beer. What day. But, really, the days do not matter. They blend into one. Just like the cocktails I make starting with 3 fingers of gin and then dump in a slew of other shit. The weather guy on KOAT — his last name is "Green" but he pronounces it as "Rain" — says to look upward tomorrow night for the "super moon," the moon in perigee, the closest it gets to earth.

What can I say of my travels? I have no Super Noonie to travel with. No companion (yet) to share amazing experiences. Besides, were are locked down; travel to major sites is dangerous, too many people show up without masks. Some wearing masks, have allowed the fabric to slip off the slope of their nose.

As you know, before I moved here, Noonie and I attended the Creativity and Madness Conference in Santa Fe. Days sitting side-by-side in hard metal chairs. One day we just had to bail. Played hooky at Bandelier National Monument with its Pueblo Indian petroglyphs and old ruins that tossed our minds backwards into the vast past of this ancient land. It was stunning. Rock formations that, I, up to then, had only dreamt about. I still haven't seen Bryce Canyon, a place Noonie vowed we'd go when we arrived here for our new life as old farts.

I would like to go there again, but not alone. I do drive around Santa Fe and its immediate environs. I ride "Lexstacy" [my Lexus SUV] up to Museum Hill for the panoramic view, a walk through the Botanical Garden to marvel at all the species of cactus and other succulents as only if few people are there; then I make my way back home via Old Santa Fe Trail Rd. past the Santa Fe Contemporary Art Museum (Noonie wrote a catalogue essay for a show there once), the Military Museum, winding my way downhill into town to kick-ass Kaune's grocery, singing this silly ditty:

> I could take the high road But I know that I'm going low I'm a ban, I'm a bandito.

Kaune's is famous. Kaune's is old. Henry Spencer Kaune established this grocery store in 1896, offering a selection that ranged from "dried beans to caviar," 108 years later, the transplanted Illinoisan's food store remains central to the Santa Fe community. Kaune's has an adoring family of shoppers who are willing to line up at the door and await entry, no matter how long the wait. It still remains a gourmand's source of all things superior. Take cheese. Jeeze, Scottish cheese! Remember the Island of Mull's cheese shop? Kaune's has Mull of Kintyre cheddar; and a Scandinavian baked cheese, Juustolelpa, produced in Darlington, WI where Noonie's cousin Eric was the editor of the town newspaper at the time a huge scandal broke out in 1985 (2 days after Noonie's 38th birthday) when a prominent circuit court judge stabbed to death his political foe's lawyer. Convicted, the judge committed suicide in prison.



But not only cheese. They have prime meats, freshest fish, my favorite spinach-stuffed ravioli, fine wines (a Vouvray Proust adored), the best oatmeal cookies in the known universe (Isabella's "The Matinee"). The list goes on.

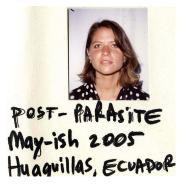
All the staff and customers wear masks, not something seen in other grocery stores here. Whenever I walk into Kaune's, mask on, it looks like bandits are running the show, a western movie set, everyone with a mask on. I suppose if you wanted to rob the place, you'd have to come in NOT wearing a mask and threaten to cough on the cashier. A cashier at the store always amuses me. He is about in his mid-50s, I'd say. His voice sounds like Kermit the Frog after 20 years of pack-a-day smoking. But he's soooo nice. Appearances can be deceiving.

Yes, it is sad your planned trip to visit here had to be postponed. I can't tell you how much I miss your company. The antiquing here is marvelous! Even better than the best stores we found in Naperville or La Grange. If you'd come, we both could've bar-bounced, looking for eligible guys around our age. Safety in numbers, huh? I dread having to do the bar scene alone. Most of the gals I know here are married, the last type to want to ride shotgun on a single woman's stage on the long dusty husband trail.

How are your cats doing at "Kitty Kottage these days?" The dogs are ecstatic here. They still mourn Noonie, though. Snowy gets a sad, faraway look and stares toward the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. They are healthier, as I walk them

daily. Snowy, unlike Tintin's dog, gets filthy fast from the furious winds blowing dust about, from the thorny plants she brushes past and stick to her like glue. Duffy, being black, shows little dirt, but his coat is so thick it makes removing dried brush as complex as an old "Mission Impossible" TV episode. No Noonie to help bathe them now. Bathing them, brushing them out, is like wrestling alligators. A vid-clip on my Facebook page of me so doing would probably go <u>viral</u> (ha, ha).

I am reading Ana Pick's Creaturely Poetics. Says we animal lovers only see our pets as toys or cartoons. And re-reading Gateway to the Moon, my Brooklyn-based writer-cousin's novel on the crypto-Jews in New Mexico. She came here and did extensive research, then took that data and shaped it into a very readable story, blending fact and imagination. I think I sent you a copy. Her accounts over the phone about living here were further carrots dangled before me. Which reminds me, remember the film student who took Noonie's theory class, the one who did a video projection installation using 3 large screens, slow-motion scanning of a scene featuring crypto-Jews in Mexico City? You saw it once on a DVD she's given us. Well, I told my cousin about her project and they connected. I was going through some files of Noonie's (the thrill of perusing "secret materials") and found a a photo of her a today. Everyone called her "Mere," so I kept thinking about Ravel's La Mer. Weird! It's dated May (5th month), 2005, 15 (5+5+5) years ago. You see, I've had this strange encounter with 5s lately. Too complicated to discuss in this letter. Phone later, maybe. On SAIC's webpage there is a link to a video interview with this "Mere" in which she praises the theory class she took with Noonie.



A recurring theme now THE EVERYDAY. The everyday stuff, the things I always look past because I walk past it too often. A French philosopher I like, Maurice Blanchot, has much to say on the topic. Something about how banality is most important if it brings us back to what is most important. Been thinking about that often here, during the lockdown, during the hours I walk the dogs around, pace inside my home like an inmate incarcerated for life, drive past the same scenes in the deserted downtown of Santa Fe. It is this unperceived that I should be concentrating on, I think. The exotic desert scenery out of town, like Tent Rock, the Pueblos, Bandelier, the mountain road to Taos, etc. demand_to be perceived, the banal, not so much.

The trick is to turn boredom into creative boredom. Chess and playing cards were major inventions born of boredom, meant to fight boredom. The Hindus tell of a bored princess, one of the many wives of the King of Lanka. Shut in the harem during a long siege on the palace that prevented people from wandering outside (not unlike our current situation!), she invented chess (Noonie told me this). I don't play it, although Noonie tried to teach me once; as you know my vices are solitaire and junk-TV. So I really need to turn this COVID crisis into Creative. Why I am setting aside some hours each day to write a book, really more an elaborate journal. I'd like to drive out to sites and do watercolors, too.



A victim of "herd-poisoning". "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free it expects what never was and never will be." — Thomas Jefferson.

Finally, what do you think of those obnoxious anti-lockdown protestors? They remain at the level of the political and economic and don't seem to be aware that despite our age of jet planes, moon rockets, skyscrapers (the Burj Khalifa), we are still in the same boat with the rabbits, foxes, pigs, coyotes, and the hippos, the level on which we are still animals. The level of biology. Many of these angry folks are young people, many whom probably tout, when it comes to the natural world, stress thinking globally. Strange that they now seem to only think narcissistically.

Speaking of biology. The Tent Caterpillars are erecting their white desert tents in my Aspens. Time to call Mazatl with his 16-foot long tree trimmer. He talks of a tree as if it had a biography as distinct and significant as his own.

Well, enough soapbox, must go, toss the clothes in the wash, wash my hands after touching the Tide container with as much vigor as if I'd pressed palms with Trump.

Love,

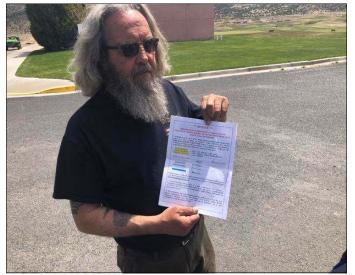
Picky

* *

In the words of Russian essayist Vasili Rozanov (d. 1919), the quintessence of human life is picking one's nose and looking at the sunset. For me it is picking my nose and watching the spectacular sunrise outside my bedroom window. The bliss of being alive in dawns. But, ominously, these are dawns that from an historical point of view are preludes to new catastrophes. I was born an optimist (ask Noonie, well, you can't now). But since 2016 and, now The Reign of COVID XIX, each day sees the sun rise to new horrors; my feeling of optimism is inversely proportional to the death count from the virus and the amount of fake news coming from the mouth of the Immanent Baboon. Each day the New Mexico statistics on the virus and list of towns disobeying lockdown measures make KOAT news:







Fanatical Mayor Hicks of Grants, NM says: "The governor is killing the state over a little bug."

The numbers are discouraging, but not as high as other states. Santa Fe County remains among the lowest in the state. But total U.S. deaths are fast approaching 70,000. Each passing day increases the possibility my future intended (or me!) will die before we meet. I am glad I don't live in Grants, a small city about 78 miles west of Albuquerque, on the Trails of the Ancients Byway. Why? The crazy mayor of the town, an EverTrumper, is defying

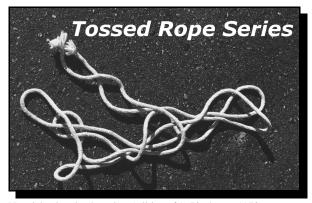
lockdown measures from our Governor.

Now another New Mexican town is up in arms, Eunice, *near the Texas border*. Eunice is an Americanized form of the Spanish name Núñez and is of Portuguese Jewish origin. In other words, the name pertains to crypto-Jews who settled in New Mexico. However, according to the history of place names in New Mexico: "The town was named after the oldest daughter of J. N. Carson, who started the post office and a general store." After WWII, the oil boom hit big and the town flourished. It appears to identify more with Texas than New Mexico.

* *

Newton had his apple, Watt his mother's tea kettle, Archimedes his bathtub, I have my hot tub. I've named it "Chili Pepper". Soaking in it, I get most of my good ideas. After a long dip, as a further anodyne to the stress these viral events stir up, I do rhythmic breathing and mental concentration. The isolating awareness of self departs for a short time. But these days I'm tempted to have a faster fix via "The Yaqui Way of Knowledge" à la Carlos Castaneda or Aldous Huxley. Noonie tried it *once*. I, never.

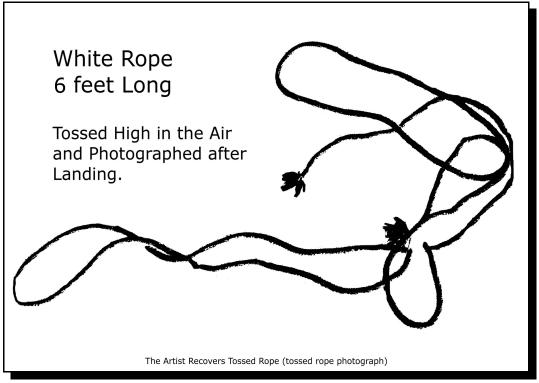
Castaneda, I'm reminded of a strange events in Noonie's life. It was 1973, he was reading Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui way of Knowledge*. He went out to do a conceptual art project for a photo class he was taking, a photobook patterns consisting of a randomly tossed white rope laying on an asphalt background, which he titled *Tossed Rope Series*. With his trusty Leica in hand, he went to an area in the foothills of the San Fernando Valley where a new tract housing project was in progress, where only the freshly paved streets were completed. No homes, no people. He began to photograph the white rope after tossing it up high in the air and letting it drop in a random pattern on the asphalt. Again



Noonie's photobook project (edition of 1, 72 photos, 1973).

and again — SNAP, SNAP, SNAP until a roll of 35mm film was shot. About half waythrough this process, a highschool-aged boy approached walking a motorcycle; he asked if he could borrow a crescent wrench to tighten his handlebar. Noonie said he didn't have one. The guy leaves. Noonie chalked it up to a strange event and forgot about it. He returned the very next day, at precisely the

same time so as to get the lighting consistent and shot another roll. Half way through shooting a 2nd roll of film, a younger boy approached, pushing a bicycle, and asked my Noonie for a crescent wrench to tighten his bicycle's handlebar. Noonie "freaked," as we put it back then. Why a wrench, a *crescent* wrench? The crescent is a powerful symbol. Why *precisely* at the same time of day? Something about the alignment of planets? Why similar modes of transport? Has 2 wheels some hidden import? Thought maybe he'd conjured up, like a *brujo*, some kind of demon or "familiar" by the persistent tossing of that rope. The phrase "Noose from Nowhere" kept flitting through his frenzied *cabeza*.



Tossed Rope (2013) A POD book by Noonie. Frontispiece image.

This enigma, a toss of the cosmic dice — er, rope — haunted Noonie all his life. Still obsessed 30 years later, he re-visited this project, making a POD book (see previous page). He tonally reversed the original images, so the rope went black against a white background — like drawings — and titled them by what their forms suggested to him.

This photobook begins, appropriately, with a rope pattern that looks like a sketch of Noonie bending to retrieve the rope for yet another toss. Other rope "sketches" are titled: "The Start of a Good Friendship," "Birth," "The Strangulation Scene from Hitchcock's *The Rope*, "Jazz Dancer," "Legless Beggar," "Man and Dog Sleeping," "Cowboy Roping a Horse," and so forth.



My Famous Rubber Band Ball.

The "artwork" that has sustained *my* obsessive interest over the years is my famous (at least among family members) Incredible Growing Rubber Band Ball, which sat on my desk in my therapy office for 30 years. Every time my mail arrived, wrapped by a rubber band, I'd add the stretchy thing to the ball. Noonie said the crisscrossing bands could be a model for the global "rhizomatic" connections created by the Internet. To me, now, it models the global pandemic path of viral infections.

Noonie teased me to sneak that rubber entity it up to the top of the Sears Tower and drop it off to see how high it would bounce. I told him it would be more conceptual if he hired a physics prof to weight the ball and calculate the math,

figuring gravity, mass, and so forth to determine the bounce height. The data, with graphs and math, would be accompanied by a photo. We never got around to it. Now my ball is big enough to play basketball with. It sits in a special box in my garage until I can find a good way to display it. I have ceased adding to it since Noonie's *murder*. There! I said it. It's what I believe. There is a reason from my past why I can't believe it was suicide. I am not ready to tell you about that. Maybe when my life begins to expand again, I will start adding to that ball, a stretch at a time.

* *

My new hair salon is located close to Meow Wolf, a famous immersive multimedia art installation that weaves stunning visuals with a mysterious dimension-travel narrative. Noonie and I had gone to see "The Beast" during that Creativity and Madness Conference. Now both establishments are closed due to the lockdown.



Val's open-mouth laugh.

On my 1st appointment at The Clip Joint, Valentina and I hit it right off. "Bali Ha'i" is playing on her stereo. A wellproportioned 35-year old Latina divorcée. A veritable database of local knowledge; a local local, very vocal, full of useful advice, like where to get lymphatic cleansing. Can quote from "Ally McBeal" sit-com episodes. Watches TikTok dance videos. Had a life of hardship, social struggle from below, finally managing to open her own salon, only to have it lashed by COVID restrictions. Credits her

success in part to self-administered sleep-teaching tapes playing under her sleep pillow. One tape she used for months to control her weight (my ears perk up) went something like this: *I am cold to chocolate, insensible to the lure of burritos, utterly unmoved by sopapillas with honey butter.* She swears that KOAT is subliminally flashing on screen during their newscasts words such as DEATH, PAIN, SUFFOCATION, KEEP DISTANT, WEAR MASK so as to re-enforce the Governor's prevention agenda. I recall that Yersinia Pestis was an advocate of subliminal modification — we had a tense back and forth over the topic at The Buzz Cafe — which can be traced back to experiments by Austrian neurologist Dr. Poetzal. Freud mentions him in a footnote in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.



There is an Instagram meets New Age fashion to The Clip Joint: indirect, subdued lighting, a Madagascan Orchid-scented candle burns on a pedestal. A poster of Instagramer Addison Rae Easterling with the caption: No description of Helen's beauty in the *Iliad*, why? The wait area is filled with gourmet, self-help, and yoga magazines.

Learning I am single, Val suggests I get a swallow tat like Johnny Depp's on my forearm, and also thinks a bronzer brushed under my cheekbones with bobcut to emphasize the shape of my face, "your red hair as a kind of corona" (only later a bad choice of words).

Having few red haired clients, she fusses over me. Pointing to the candle, she tells me that Darwin discovered the Madagascan orchid *Angraecum sesquipedale*. Winking, she informs me that the plant has a tubular nectar receptacle 11 inches deep: "An irresistible organ to a macho moth with a long nectar-sucking proboscis willing to pollinate it." Our gazes meet, laughing.

During my 2nd appointment a month later, she broaches the topic of pheromones.* How they are supposed to attract "Optimal Men". Suggests a product she's used herself — "I tell you, it works!" — AlfaMarker Flame. Aimed at hooking an alpha male I presume.

^{*} A pheromone is a secreted or excreted chemical factor that triggers a social response in members of the same species, capable of acting like hormones outside the body of the secreting individual, to impact the behavior of the receiver of the scent.

Today is National Nurses Day and Valentina is my "fashion nurse", why my thoughts turn to this unusual woman — whatever I ask her to do with my hair, she replies *Ningun probelma*. Her salon is on a road I call "Humps-for-a-Mile," for all the speed bumps (*topes*) suffered enroute. This is my 3rd cutting. She's added a large poster of a Monarch butterfly to the wall; tells me about traveling to the Michoacán Monarch Butterfly Reserve at 10,000 feet in central Mexico near Morelia a year ago. "Millions of butterflies wintering in oyamel fir trees. I was swimming in a sea of butterflies, Picky."

On this visit, my 3rd, I'm limping. "*La vieja cojea*," Val calls me. I learn that as a freshman in highschool she trained in dance, could "touch the back of my head with my toes." Her dance (and girl's gym) instructor, Jennie Schwartz, was a "peculiar woman from New York always dressed in tights, teaching us with a deadpan expression on her face. She told us students that dance was 'salvation through sweat' (STS). But she also encouraged us to be 'surprised by small things.' She was the type that believes in Chairman Mao, but refuses to curb her dog." I nod my head knowingly, almost screwing up my haircut. "Her gyne-cologist went down on Korean Flight 007, or so Jennie claimed." I didn't tell her Noonie's theory about that ill-fated flight, something to do with its James Bond 007 flight number.



Besides clipping hair, Val offers dating advice for singles seeking multiracial partners, which she calls Singles' Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP). And, she sells custom-made feminist T-shirts in her shop. I bought one. "In one dance exercise," Val continues as she clips me, "Jennie had us pretend we were a dysfunctional machine, fitting our bodies together like machine parts, interlocking arms and legs into near impossible postures. The exercise began when this 'machine' shifted gears, groaned, sweated,

and farted, but didn't move an inch. I liked it. It reminded me of my uncle Jose's old rustedorange Ford pickup which he'd dubbed *El Estornudo*, The Sneeze, because it's timing was always off, its cylinders crapped up with carbon. By the way, *mi tío* taught me to fish using chewing gum as bait and that red ants tasted 'lemony.' What an *hombre gracioso*!"

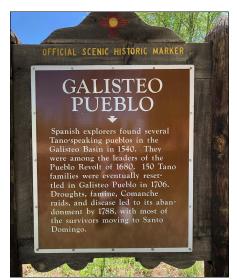
I'm listening with rapt attention because I trained from age 7 - 18 in ballet with Edna L. McRae, an American dancer, choreographer and dance teacher, often called the Grand Dame of the Chicago ballet community. She was hard nails as a drill sergeant. She was born in June, died in June, a week apart. Noonie and I were both born in June, a week apart in dates (but Noonie lacked a layer of skin compared to most). Just hold that thought.

Val tells me Jennie — "A fanatic for Pina Bausch, like me" — got fired a year later because "she'd choreographed a modern dance piece, 'Multitudinous Seas Incarnadine', that employed the display of tampons dipped in red paint and what the school's principal called 'Badly chosen words.' One shocked male administrator screamed during the hearing that followed, 'It's nuffta curdle da blood,' referring to the exposure of 'that unspeakable object' during a school performance. Picky, he was a He-for-God-only-She-for-God-and-Him kind

of shit, if you know what I mean." A surprising reference to Milton's (sexist) reference to Adam and Eve. Surprised at her smarts, I learn she earned an A.A. degree, trained as a dental assistant, originally, working in Santa Fe in the office of a Korean dentist suffering sleep apnea, a guy known for his wacky humor (his staff called him See-Ho-Ho-Ho), before going on to Vogue College of Cosmetology here, apprenticing at Wild Hare Salon, but fired for talking back to a racist woman from Vidor, Texas. (Factoid: "If English was good enough for Christ, it's good enough for us," said a 1920s Texas governor opposed to the teaching of foreign languages). Val, in spite, opened her own salon. Wild Hare closed a year later.

We are always laughing. Sometimes cutting humor about the Immanent Baboon. She tells me what part of the demagogue she'd like to cut off. Good for my spirits. *Locals here are a feast for the soul*, I think. Although I miss Noonie's out-of-the-ballpark humor, Val provides some *bearable* lightness of being. She has *brass titties*.

What surprises me the most about Val is that during all this giving forth of information — her myriad stories, her gently-given motherly advice, her off-color jokes, her conspiracy theories that make you feel something could be true, untrue, both, or neither she maintains perfect task-at-hand attention to cutting my hair. I think about the Zen master who is asked by a student what is the highest wisdom and got the reply, "Attention!" Val *attends* to my hair in all the richness that word can evoke.



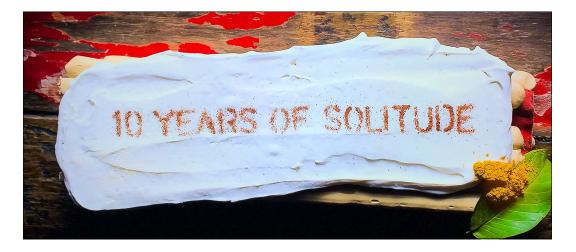
Proof I followed Valentina's advice.

On my 4th cutting, my last visit before the lockdown, Val suggests I take a drive south past El Dorado and Lamy (where I had looked at houses to buy) to Galisteo. "Very interesting landscape, a few intriguing art galleries guarded by large dogs, and very historical," she tells me, "as it was home to Tano-speaking pueblos until 1788 when a decimated Indian population abandoned the Galisteo Basin and trekked to Santo Domingo, where they were respected since the leaders of the 1680 Revolt that kicked the Spanish out were drawn from their ranks." I learn, too, that many Western movies were filmed in that general area.

Val advises me *not* to bother to go further south to the town of Moriarty (Noonie would've

insisted we go thanks to his Sherlock Holmes fixation). "Since it is called 'The Crossroads of Opportunity', perfectly located in the heart of New Mexico along the Historic Route 66, the 'The Mother Road', just 40 miles north of Albuquerque [which Noonie called "AllBeQuirky"], the place is for shit. It's only claim to fame is the Lewis Antique Auto & Toy Museum," she adds. Noonie would've liked that. I like cars and toys, too. So I might ignore Val, "take" Noonie there, introduce him to staff, just as Elwood P. Dowd does his imaginary rabbit, a *pooka*, in the play *Harvey*. Hell, I did this a lot, show an invisible Noonie

about, right after he died. I showed him through my tastefully decorated house here when I initially moved in. The process of grieving. My self-generated propaganda for getting me through a very difficult time. I *wanted* to be gullible: *I am cold to skepticism, insensible to the lure of other men, utterly open to seeing Noonie at my side, with me he doth still abide.* Without Noonie, this is what I fear might be my unjust dessert:



Does this mean I might soon be posting on JDate, Santa Fe something like:

Kind of Youthful Female Psychoanalyst

Seventy-something, retired, widowed redhead, seeks caring, compatible man who would like same. Must adore gardens, dogs, find KN-95 masks on women kinky, like the smell of Clorox, permit me to wear a feminist T-shirt to cocktail parties and allow me to kneel on a knee during the National Anthem. Kosher offers only.



Yah, like *that* is going to float, huh? But Val finds it hilarious and a laugh is a laugh, is a laugh right? Yes, this must be taken in a "Picky-wickian sense." So is this jpeg Val emails me this most delightful of New Mexican evenings. It's a funny snap of her young cousin, Teresa, a new mom, hamming it up for her hubby with mask and bottle. Anything to break the monotony of lockdown, right?

<

"Why, William, sit you thus alone / And dream your time away? . . . Come, hear the woodland linnet; / How sweet his music!" William Wordsworth's words come to me as I laze supine on my chaise, flowers starting around me, listening to the morning birds in my aspen sing their praises to the new sun. As bushtits flashmob my birdbath. My backyard, a world of mystery, of endless unique events, I now perceive in a state of alert receptiveness, no thought of explaining (like "Noonie's Analytics"). A flower can be a wordless sermon, a means toward enlightenment. Above me, in the sky, sun rising, picture after picture, glory after glory, an endless pleasure, said Ruskin. I agree. Somewhere out there, among the piñon, blue fescue and cholla, a rattlesnake slowly sneaks, hunts a rabbit. I hunt a new spouse.

I was able to achieve a deep openness to my surroundings within the walls of my Oak Park Garden of Song, reciting Anaïs Nin: "And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight inside the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." But too often sirens, car radios booming, screaming children, jets taking off from O'Hare, trash collection, and large trucks rumbling by smashed through the walls. But here at 35 degrees north by 106 degrees west, 6720 feet altitude, all is silent, for hours, except for a slight breeze that will grow into a howl and those melodious birds whose cries will gradually diminish.

Supine. My mind wanders across the Atlantic, to the English Blue Tit. This species is capable of feeding in almost any position: upside down, or right side up, on the ground or suspended precariously on a flower head, or at the end of a string. A bird's version of the Kama Sutra. Have to mention this to Val at my next cutting, whenever that will be. I try to think of birds as individuals, as different among themselves as dogs are. Len Howard wrote a book *Birds as Individuals*. I wonder what wonders the birds experience flying about, what my Whiptails, skittering about their world, their *Umwelt*, could pass on to us, to me. Oh, what homilies they might give if we paid reverence to their nonverbal expression.



"Queen Lizzy" (or is it "Lizbeth Scott"?), 1 of a pair of Whiptail lizards on my side deck, is camera shy. She keeps close to her home in the bush.

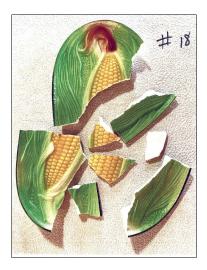
I have a pair of New Mexican Whiptail lizards living in a bush alongside my side deck. The dogs are fascinated by them because they move fast then freeze for minutes at a time. Both are females, because Whiptails are *all* female. I like that. They reproduce by interspecies hybridization and parthenogenesis. My yard is host to the start of a women-only community as envisioned in feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman's

ground-breaking utopian novel *Herland* (1915). Since these cautious creatures come out to watch me drink a cocktail or read, they've become companions. I've named them "Queen

Lizzy" and "Lizbeth Scott". Kind of silly as I can't tell them apart. I wonder what they think of me. I like the fact they dine on insects that I find repellent. Like the scary caterpillar I squish after breakfast today. It has the nerve to crawl up the exterior to my house toward my open office window near the front door.

But there's more. I notice, near the front gate, on my sidewalk, another strange, repellant sight. At 1st I take it for 2 snakes coupling. No. Someone dropped a skull-and-crossbones decorated small dog collar at my doorstep. Whaaaazzzzat about? If it had been an aggressive dog, a Rottweiler-size dog collar, okay, but this thing would fit my gentle pups. Was someone sending me a threatening message? An Ever-Trumper who knows I'm a Never-Trumper? Or was it merely another roll of the comic dice? I now began to understand something of Noonie's apprehension over the eldritch events surrounding his Tossed Rope book project. Maybe I should toss this death-collar up and down, photographing it as Noonie did his rope. See what happens. Might conjure Noonie's shade up from the depths! Think of that. *No, better not*.





My is heart broken like the antique corn-dish broken during United Van Line's abusive transit of my life's goods to my home here. Upset, I retreat to my bedroom, to my yoga mat. Sitting in a Virasana or Hero Pose (a kneeling asana), I think: *Breathing in, I know I will have let go everything and everyone I love. Breathing out, I know there is no way to bring them along.*

Repeat.

Breathing in, I know I will have let go everything and everyone I love. Breathing out, I know there is no way to bring them along.

Repeat.



Maybe COVID XIX has met his match in this Native American warrior.

6.0

Abe and Flo Rivers think the placement of the skull 'n crossbones dog collar is deliberate. That the pipe-smoking old fart who looks like an Irish Leprechaun in his moss-green hat, who daily walks, with affected athleticism, his small, nasty-tempered mutt named "Fang Fang" to his mailbox, and lives across the street from me, is the dog-collar culprit. They tell me he's already tossed some word-stones ("Fang you") their way for letting their pair of male corgis hike on his tall, rust-colored decorative stones that mark the start of his property.

"Deary," Flo tells me over the phone, "it's that horrid little man's way of telling you he thinks you are, as the locals here say, a *perroflauta*. Spanish slang, very disrespectful, referring to folks, like you, with marked Leftist ideas — pro-choice, pro-multiculturalism, pro-immigration, pro-feminism, pro-molecular cooking — that are often seen on the street or in the Plaza downtown playing a flute and sitting near a dog."

I meet Abe and Flo (and that Leprechaun across the street I've dubbed "Moss") a month after arriving here. It is one of those New Mexican days with equal periods of sun and clouds, a chance of a shower late. It is the anniversary of Noonie's death and not wanting to be alone I attend the "Mingle-Bingle" newcomers' gathering at our Aldea community center. Maybe I will make a new friend. The H.O.A. center sits on the highest hill in our community and is fine example of Pueblo revival style.



The Aldea H.O.A. building as seen from my kitchen window.

I dress to the hilt for this event to make a good impression. Not the best idea, though. The evening begins with introductions of new residents, most wearing blue jeans, cowboy shirts and boots. When I stand up to introduce myself I look like a high class snob. But there's plenty of good pizza ("Za"), beer, and wine, lots of chit-chat, musical chairs to get people to mingle, followed by Bingo ("Bingle").

I, sit minglin' 'n binglin', at the Bingo table, Abe to port. Flo to starboard. The Head of the H.O.A., a Gary Cooper in snakeskin cowboy hat and boots, turns the basket, picking the numbers in a voice used to exercising authority (Flo informs me he's a retired weatherman from KOAT whose guffaw commanded entire newsrooms). After several sessions of Bingo — I win once — I get the impression these 2 are 2 solitudes that protect, border, and greet each other like pop love songs. Flo has bad RA and needs a hubby that is supportive.

Earlier, we hit it off over pizza when it became apparent all 3 of us are Never Trumpers. Abe is a retired ACLU lawyer, Flo's been involved in the Head Start program for years. They lived in Philadelphia before moving here a few years ago into a condo unit just up the hill from me. Our conversation over red wine escalates to include witchcraft, communicating with dogs, foodie chat, home design, numerology, violence, elves, leprechauns, soccer versus football, how Bob Marley might've forestalled his final illness, Native American Ledger Art and where to buy it (Stephen Fox's New Millennium Gallery on Francisco Street), and the best breakfasts in Santa Fe (Pasqual's on Don Gaspar Avenue and Los Potrillos on Cerrillos Road). All these closed now due to the lockdown.

Flo really warms to me when she finds out I taught highschool English before going on for my psychoanalytic degrees. Amazing! Comparing notes, we find we both taught our students a jingle to help them learn prepositions in grammar; laughing we sing it together:

The Preposition Jingle

With, on, for, after, at, by, in, Against, instead of, near, between, By, off, from, under, down, below, Through, over, up, according to,

Abroad, across, beyond about, Before, behind, within, without, Around, about, amidst, above, Toward, notwithstanding, into, of,

Beside, to, beneath, upon, Inside, outside, except, among, Along, until, like, during, past, Are prepositions that will last!

> (as taught to all 8th grade students by Miss Marion Zimmer at the Jamieson School in Chicago)

Convivial conversation, distracted only by Flo's disconcerting habit of slowly shaking her head as if denying the point she is trying to make, and my urge to spy out the corner of my eye at Moss, his green hat on, alone in a chair guzzling a dark beer. He's a black hole sucking all joy — people give him a wide berth — while giving us the once-over, disapproving what he sees and hears. Flo whispers that Moss, who lives alone, his only friends his green hat, curved pipe and aggressive dog, is a "stray" — a person who never

really becomes part of life for whatever reasons: genetic and/or the roll of the cosmic dice. "Oh! If he'd had the advantage of being in a Head Start Program when very young," she says. She and Abe took a Wilderness Tour to the Australian Outback a year ago where "An Aboriginal we met told us dogs make people human, but it hasn't for Moss, has it?"

I am sure Moss recognizes me as the newbie whose persistently large, discombobulated pile of plastic bags, cut up moving boxes, and remnants of furniture busted up in the move here sits annoyingly outside across from his front window. He has vigorously complained to our Home Owners Association about my "fuckin' mess," but they told me they told him to cut me slack: "She's single, still unpacking; just chill for a few weeks." But he still looks like he's sizzling. Maybe Flo's unshakeable belief that he's the skull-andcrossbones culprit holds water. But I confess, my belief on that issue ebbs and flows each day according to my morning moods and whether I see him walking Mavor or not.

I am hoping for an introduction to a single man by Abe or Flo. Quickly scanning the room, I only see couples, maybe a few unattached women, husbands unwilling to play Bingo or widows or divorcees. When Flo and I go to ladies room together, as we freshen up I mention my loss, my hopes for a new relationship. Her advice is "to chill," wait awhile longer. "Get aclimatized to your new surroundings first, Picky. There is so much difference here compared to the East. It was a culture shock for us when we got here."

When we get back to our table she provides a litany of factoids. Many just concerning "the crazy drivers here": speeding, riding your tail, missing license plates on vehicles, blowing stop lights, flipping you off. Next, it's "the changeability of the weather": wind followed by calm, then wind, rain, clear sky followed by huge clouds, wind again, snow, clearing, rain, sun. I am warned about seasonal issues. In spring its "bad winds, tent caterpillars, and our allergy season."

About our mail service: "Say you mail someone a card who lives in Santa Fe; it first goes to Albuquerque, then back to Santa Fe. The mail in Aldea comes late, it comes to your mailbox two blocks away; a separate key is put in your box to open the special larger box for larger packages; while people open their boxes, their dogs crap around the mailbox." About people here: "There is a man, during the summer when residents' windows are open, who hates dogs barking and he yells at the top of his lungs 'SHUT THAT FUCKIN' DOG UP!' over and over in a drunken voice." About crime: "People in trucks cruise about and once in a while a car gets broken into or someone approaches a house to see if residents are in; many residents here are seasonal and their homes are unoccupied, hence, vulnerable. Everyone has, or should have, a good security system." When I ask about plumbing services, she warns, "Usually the maintenance people who show up right away when you call are dishonest, the best guys are always the last to show up." All of this information is given with that persistent nod of hers, seeming to negate her assertions, including her summation: "But, Picky, you can't be too picky here. It is, after all, paradise, you know." *Or pair of dice? Go with the roll, Pick!*

The Bingo winners each get a \$50 WalMart gift card. We clap. The crowd slowly dissolves. The H.O.A. head is chatting up possible volunteers for various committees. Abe and Flo, and I exchange phone numbers. I leave, head buzzing from the wine.



"Mendel" (foreground) with "Monte Carlo" (background).

Since COVID XIX's reign has imprisoned us, Abe and Flo keep in touch by phone. Or we yell across the road to each other as we walk our dogs in opposite directions. They have a cute pair of corgi pups "Mendel" and "Monte Carlo" (a reference to the existential debate between determinism and chance). They dislike using e-mail and loath texting. "It destroys *la vie cérébrale*," Flo argues, "those modes of communication are more susceptible to bad brain farts." A topic she has expat-

iated on in a recent essay she Xeroxed and snail- mailed me: "Ars honeste Petandi" ("The Art of Farting Honestly") published A Head Above, an Office of Head Start publication. Therein, she asserts that "the solemn mammoths of stupidity, the mouse-brained, slow-moving prehistorics in the White House and other agencies who are trying to manage this *turpissima pestis* (most foul plague) had their brains tenderized over many years of immersion in the sinister soup of the digital mishmash. No wonder we have a deepening sense of helplessness, of not being master of our own fate."

After handling her letter, I wash my hands. Letters, packages, canned goods - I



Matthew Arnold.

obsessively wipe them down with disinfectant even before opening them. Wash my hands afterwards, then wash down the counter top they've occupied with Clorox. I then sometimes find myself recalling Matthew Arnold's (not the contemporary film director, the old Brit poet and critic) nearly unpronounceable query: "What props, thou ask'st, in these bad days of mind?"

What? Indeed!



United Van Lines arrives with my damaged goods.

The 2nd week of August 2019, my "props" from my old home in Oak Park arrive. Nine months later I am still trying to get monetary compensation for the many items broke beyond repair. The van is improperly packed. Its load shifts. Thousands of pounds of pressure are exerted on boxes and plastic containers full of my precious belongings. A large screw holding a piece of furniture together bends as easily as my index finger. I take photos. I fill out forms. I argue with claim adjusters. After COVID arrives, I need to resubmit photos in more detail as no agent can come personally out to verify the damage. I send them new images. Still no check in the mail.

The move starts in November 2018. For half a year Anthony and I pack

and clean my old house, which goes on the market. Anthony, a black man I call "Saint Anthony," who without his steady assistance my house sale and move here would have been impossible. My children are too far away to come with any regularity. Noonie offers discorporate encouragement from on high, but . . .

One winter 3 years ago, during a 20-inch blizzard, Anthony, tall, kind face, appealing, knocks on our door wanting to shovel snow. Noonie's bad back (L-5 compressed disc) makes it difficult for him to wield a snow shovel. *The rest is history* as the cliché goes. After Noonie's demise, Anthony steps up to the plate, so to speak. He bubble-wraps all my delicate items. He sweeps, carries boxes, moves furniture, cleans the attic and basement (places I fear to tread due to the combination of sheer junk piled high and nasty spiders). Anthony paints, touches up marred woodwork, carries Pine Bark Mini-Nuggets for my garden (see photo of my garden in the Introduction), helps me plant bulbs. Pulls weeds. Most importantly, he *encourages* me. He is solid. A rock of Gibralter in my ebb and flow life without Noonie. I, of course, pay him well, but how do you *really* pay back that mixture of hard work and kindness? I do send him Harry & David "care-packages" on holidays and his birthday. Small rewards for what he's done for me. We chat on the phone, especially since the lockdown. I worry for him. He lives in the Austin neighborhood just east of Oak Park. The other day a young black man was murdered in front of his house.

Yes, Noonie and I throughout our lives have been favored by the toss of the cosmic dice, the best throw of those dice bringing us together in 1997. Next was Anthony walking



Ventriloquist Shirley Dinsdale with her dummy Judy Splinters.

into our lives. Then, getting reservations to Noma, voted the World's Best Restaurant 3 years in a row, on the *1 day* we'd be in Copenhagen during a tour of Scandinavia.

Another lucky moment, but dating back to when I am 6. I live in the Sovereign Hotel in Chicago for a year while our new house is being built. My girl friend Judy and I discover that Shirley Dinsdale and her TV-famous ventriloquist dummy Judy Splinters reside in the same hotel! Her TV show, "Judy Splinters," is among our favorites. We stake out the lobby. Watch for her comings and goings. Sneak into the bar to observe her drink cocktails with her agent. Finally, we get enough nerve to take the elevator up and up and up to her floor, boldly knock on her door, shyly introduce ourselves. To our surprise she befriends us.

Not long after, in early 1950, her producer invites us on live TV to play the 2 evil sisters to Judy Splinters role as *Cinderella*. I wear my mother's brown taffeta dress (tied and pinned up to fit me). My reward for my performance is a 3-foot Judy Splinters doll. I still have it . Or I should say, *had* it, the movers from hell smashed it.

Dinsdale's Emmy winning show initially aired live as a local program in Los Angeles in 1947 (the year Noonie was born), moved to Chicago in June 1949, and then on to New York for 9 months. Dinsdale died on 5/9/1999, 2 years and 2 months (2 + 3 = 5) after Noonie and I met. Little Noonie, unbeknown to me, is at this time living only 2 miles from me, and a devoted fan of "Howdy Doody," never watching my favorite.

Years later, Noonie and I share our love of our respective childhood television programs. Particularly those featuring ventriloquist dummies. Sometimes Noonie and I put sock puppets on our hands and perform mock therapy sessions, trying to keep our mouths as still as possible.

I mention to Noonie the dates listed above pertaining to my Judy Splinters adventure and with great numerological excitement he points out the "strange coincidence" of the 5 9s associated with her TV career, our meeting, and her death. He says, "Number 5 must have been her 'personality number' signifying being witty and bright, a risk-taker who likes variety of experience and change; contingency invigorated her most." Yes, that would describe a live TV performer, especially a ventriloquist. And yes, I think Noonie could've had his own TV show, "Great Numerical Coincidences," on the History Channel. My honey had both the academic credentials and that I-believe-in-UFOs kind of nutty fixation that attracts TV producers' noses toward the flowering talent that will lead to the honey — er, money.



Speaking of old shows. And the tendency for Trump and other officials to be "whistling past the graveyard." *The Voice of the Whistler* (William Castle, dir., 1945) is on the Movie Channel's Noir Tuesday. It is the 4th of 7 such films star-ring Richard Dix. I sit with my bowl of hot air popped popcorn and listen to the opening lines: [Eerie whistling and music. A shadow moves across cliff rocks. Voice-over narration.] *I am the Whistler and I know many things, for I walk by night. I know many strange tales hidden in the hearts of men and women who have stepped into the shadows. Yes, I know the nameless terrors of which they dare not speak. And one of the greatest of these terrors is loneliness. In my wanderings I have seen the lonely people of*

the earth. I have seen their drawn and haunted faces in the cities of teeming millions. And I have seen them, too in places that have been long deserted, and forgotten. Gull Point lighthouse was abandoned many years ago, but today a woman lives here all alone. She never leaves her forlorn and isolated home. And so hers is a strange story for she loved the bustling city, the gay crowds, the laughter of pleasant company. Why then has she shut herself away in this desolation where no one ever comes to visit her? Her's is a story of loneliness...



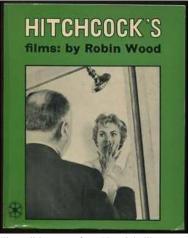
Richard Dix.

I nearly choke on my popcorn. A sad story of loneliness! Why is she self-quarantining? In an hour I will know. But I know now why I am a shut-in and lonely. That movie's opening really strikes home during the Reign of COVID XIX. How odd that coincidence! Or possibly the cable TV programming folks thought it "cool" to screen this film now.

If Noonie was sitting next to me, he'd be bouncing on the sofa (maybe his discorporate self *is* sitting next to me). Noonie was a big fan of Richard Dix. His father was a fan of Richard Dix. His father's father was a fan of Richard Dix. Something about Dix's voice, demeanor. Google a YouTube

film of his, see what I mean. Noonie never missed a Dix film. In the *Whistler* series, Dix, much to his satisfaction, got to play a wide range of characters, showing off his talents.

I recall how an evening's viewing of Dix in a 1946 Whistler movie, *Mysterious Intruder*, ended with Noonie waxing eloquent over Dix's voice and manner of delivery, his "grain of voice," a reference to French theorist Roland Barthes' 1972 essay "The Grain of the Voice". Therein, Barthes theorizes the "grain" inherent in spoken or sung vocalizations whereby *the grain is the body in the voice as it sings or speaks*. As Noonie explained once after we saw an opera: "The 'grain' is more than timbre, Picky, it is the language of sound supplementing the language of sense." Googling this interesting concept on my iPad, I read:



First edition copy from Noonie's library.

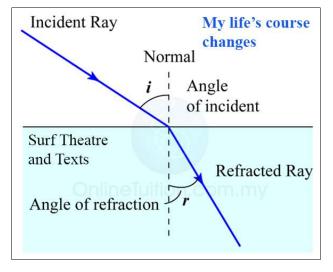
"Barthes identifies and examines the split between voice and language as a form of bodily communication that circumvents the laws and limits of the linguistic sphere, and reveals the materiality of language from within." Okay. If you say so.

Ah, Noonie, he understood that stuff, could suss out the most esoteric aspects in popular culture, especially in film. The 1st book of film criticism he read was *Hitchcock's Films* by Robin Wood. Noonie had been wholly captivated by *Vertigo*. Wanted to know more about it. He stumbled on that book in 1968 while in the

Air Force, stationed near San Francisco.



The Surf Theatre, San Francisco as Noonie would've seen it.



Thereafter, he'd go to see all sorts of art films, foreign and domestic, at the famous Surf Theatre on Irving Street between 46th and 47th Avenues. It was a beacon of international sophistication for many on many a foggy night. Noonie saw films there by such notables as Federico Fellini, Akira Kurosawa, Satyajit Ray, Ingmar Bergman, and Jean-Luc Godard. This confluence of text and place, over 4 years of attendance and further readings in film history and theory, had a profound effect on Noonie's life. He even diagramed out how the path of his intellectual life abruptly shifted thereafter, using as a model the refraction of light as he said he was "illuminated" by these film experiences. Watching these old noirs, I feel a shadowy presence of Nooniethe-cineaste. But not so painfully

lonely as that sad lady haunting the lighthouse in the Whistler film.

* *

"Help! — help a not so little old lady here?" I haven't had to say this yet. Yet. Nothing new. A taboo around aging. Older folk are often seen as losers. Sickness is taboo, too. Losers get sick. Losers as per Trump. COVID has taught us the medical class operates at the highest professional level, the political class not. I hide all my medicines and herbal supplements in a drawer. No visitor, if I ever have one, especially a man, will see all these capsules. Right now I have nothing better to do than list them. Besides, the hospital will need this information if COVID XIX gropes me and UC-ME rushed to the ICU:

EXHIBITION OF MEDICINES

Prilosec Crestor **Turkey Tail Mushrooms Biosil** Ultra Tart Cherry Extract Fexofinadine Fucoidan Losartan Low Dosage Aspirin Niacinamide Acetyl L-Carnitine Gingko Biloba Prevagen Turmeric Fish Oil Centrum Silver Multi-Vitamins Glucosamine/Chondrotin/MSN Echinacea Mixture of Herbal Anti-Oxidants Aleve



We all need to talk about the everyday experiences of the elderly as our population ages. Especially now. Millennials seem to want to avoid that. Some seem to secretly wish COVID on us old farts by avoiding masks, congre-

gating in large groups (Wisconsin bars and restaurants are now open and packed with

MAY 13TH COVID-19 CASE UPDATE

POSITIVES: 5,364 total, 155 new today

HOSPITALIZATIONS: 200 total, 52 on ventilators

DECEASED: 231 total, 12 new deaths announced today

 115.011 total tests conducted statewide

 cononwinus

 CORONAVIRUS IMPACT ➤ TESTING INFORMATION AND RES

 Litp://cv.nmhealth.org | The New Mexico Department of Health

Example of daily posting of New Mexico cases.



ICE detention center, El Paso, TX has an outbreak.



I put on my sexiest lipstick and go to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum.

millennials thinking themselves immune, pissed that 50 days have passed under their Gov's lockdown order). When I go to Market Street Foods, unmasked millennials rush me, mill about close, talking loudly amongst themselves. They want me to yell: SOCIAL DISTANCE YA DORKS! PUT A MASK ON MORONS! But I ignore them, hold my breath. I read somewhere that in the Netherlands some irate millennials wrote articles suggesting that the voting rights of the older generation be taken away as they felt that age-group tended to vote down climate-change legislation.

When I return from venturing into COVID-LAND, I calm myself down by yelling RECORDINGS into my Infinity Cable TV's remote, selecting, and watching an episode of that popular British food series "The Great Baking Show". I find the show very soothing; no one is catty or mean. Instead of competing against one another, contestants encourage each other to become better bakers. Noonie watched an episode once and suggested the producers change the show's title to "221 Be A. Baker Street".

Repugnant not to have closeness. Miss art exhibitions with Noonie. His insights on the art, his pace through the galleries. I miss being able to go to local Santa Fe Museums, even if alone. I did go to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum here before the lockdown. Hoping I might meet a single guy there. Love is blind. O'keeffe died blind. Mutual art interests. Dress to the max in Johnny Was, spread my vividdddest lipstick across lips eager for a smooch, spend hours on my hair, the dryer like a huge bee buzzing 'bout my head. I imagine wandering the Collection for an hour or



François Barbier's Ruined Column House, Désert de Retz Garden, France.

more, until slowly approaching a well-dressed man of interest who is also alone. He occasionally, in a preening alpha-male gesture, shoots his cuffs and massages the right cufflink. I maneuver cautiously such that eventually both of us come to be standing side-by-side, looking at a sexually suggestive flower painting by the Chatelaine of Ghost Ranch in Abiquiú. We talk. He has a passion for palindromes, a weakness for alliteration, a compulsive reader. Says he likes the word *regarding*, as it is both gerund and a preposition. In the casinos he has uncanny luck at blackjack. He further impresses me by telling me he's been to France, north-central France's Désert de Retz garden to photograph François Barbier's massive ruined column house, *La colonne détruite*

(1871), for an architectural journal. We look at each other. Unerring kinematics of light bounce between our gazes. The expression of . . .

Well, the reality is that nothing like this occurs, of course. Few people are in the galleries, it being off-season. I do have space to enjoy the paintings without people blocking my view. O'Keeffe's *Black Place* (1944) being 1 of several works engaging the softly rounded gray formations found in the landscape on either side of N.M. 550. The "Black Place" was the name Georgia O'Keeffe gave to 1 of her favorite painting sites. It is located in the northwest portion of the Lybrook Fossil Area (commonly referred to as the Lybrook Badlands), about 150 miles northwest of her home. That painting still haunts me.

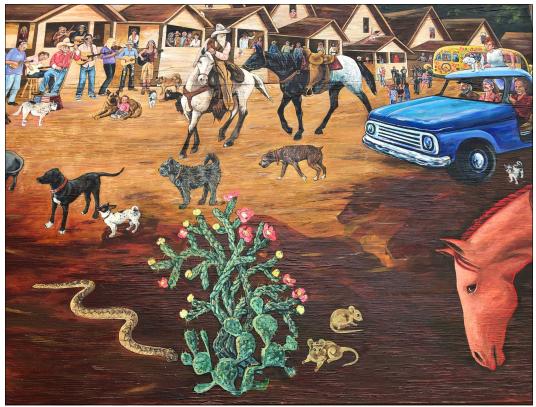
A wall text relates that today Black Place is on federal land about a mile from the turnoff to Chaco Canyon and is surrounded by evidence of the world's energy needs: oil rigs, pipelines, storage pads; the detritus of fracking. Those that do are mostly women and children.

On exiting the museum, walking alone back to my usual parking slot on Otero Street, I notice a most peculiar thing. A dead fish laying curbside near my SUV. I bend down to see if what I am seeing is what I am seeing. A lightless pupil sunk flush as a thumb tack in a river trout stares back at me. For a moment our universes are held locked into each other, confirming each's presence, albeit one as alive, the other as dead. I didn't think of it then, of course, but that encounter between life and death figures the Reign of COVID XIX under the auspices of our present-day fishy politicians where the scales of justice have been perverted. When I arrive home and check my e-mail I find a message from the museum:

Please rate your experience of your experience: Pleased mostly? Pleased neutral? Displeased or not pleased at all? Recommend to a friend?



Nob Hill Mural, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Picky Hunting.



Wall mural, Madrid, New Mexico, Picky Hunting.

* * *

7.0



Artwork found on a gate in Madrid, NM.

In lieu of going to museums, now closed, I find excellent art outside in the everyday environment. Santa Feans prize their "art not work" ethos. One can find stunning murals, sculpture, paintings just by walking around in small towns. My trip to Madrid yielded some excellent examples. Or I can make my own art. I am the unsalaried artist-inresidence of The Peaceable Kingdom West. I paint wooden chairs, I create an eye-impacting garden. I do ink drawings and watercolors of my dogs in various scenarios. I make 3-D dioramas. I photograph. I stage my home's rooms for full visual effect. Noonie was always praising my artistic talent.

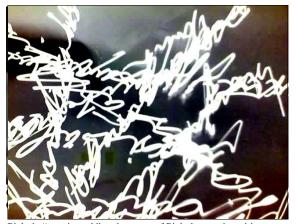
During the shut-in, I am learning to take virtual museum tours. A glut of art online, but where to start? I scroll through Google Arts &

Culture tours, clicking into a museum of modern art in Milan ("Milan is for art lovers" reads a link), where a caption informs me "This collection includes famous paintings and sculptures, living together within the walls of the museum." I want to write back: "This woman, rather generously sculpted, who likes to paint and take photos, lives alone, except for her dogs, is an artist-in-residence within the walls of a Pueblo-revival structure, in an artloving community, without her 'odd number' of a husband."

Some links don't work — I call my cursor a "curser" when this happens. I click again and get access to a 2017 exhibition, "Cento Anni: Sculpture in Milan 1815 -1915," frozen in time on-screen, like my photos of Noonie hamming it up in front of artworks taken in top museums over a period of 20 years during our world travels.

Every virtual tour I click into is peppered with empty benches, the only inhabitants in the galleries now. Eventually, as I scroll through these vacant museum spaces, these common objects take on a strangeness, a "presence" that vies for attention as much as the artworks surrounding them. They speak to me of loneliness.

I imagine myself sitting there in the empty space on a empty gallery bench, looking at a sign reading: *The museum was abandoned many years ago, but today a woman lives here all alone. She never leaves her forlorn and isolated museum home. And so hers is a strange story for she loved the bustling city, the gay crowds, the laughter of pleasant company of art openings. Why then has she shut herself away in this desolation where no one ever comes to visit her? Hers is a story of loneliness . . .*



Picky's "mystic pad," an instance of Picky's asemic writing.



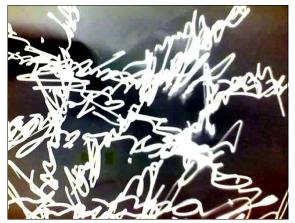
"Star Trek: The Next Generation". Dimension-travel scene.

It seems I can't escape my situation. Everything reminds me of the shut-in I am, prowling my house-cage in these Corona Times; of the lonely widowhood I live out each day; single with a single coffee mug. A bed with one side mussed, the other not. One dinner plate to wash. A mirror with no one else seen in it but me. Sometimes, though, I rush over to the bathroom mirror, holding up my dog, telling her: "See, that's mommy, that's your owner! See?" Like her seeing me confirms I exist. Without Noonie to "mirror" me and vice versa, I feel less of what I was.

On our many travels, Noonie and I always took photos of us in mirrored elevators. Noonie reminded me that Leonardo's notebooks were written in mirror-reversal; one could only read them via mirror, making the mirror image more real than the notebooks themselves. Yes, we often speculated about mirror images, whether

there were 2 separate things, namely a *mirror image* on the surface of the mirror and a *virtual mirror image* of the material thing that appears to us to be "apparently" behind (inside) the mirror. The latter image has opened up weird speculations about "another world or universe" mirroring our own. Noonie pointed to mirror-as-entry-point to the underworld in Jean Cocteau's 1950 surrealist classic *Orphée* and, in other fictions, as portal to other worlds. Then, of course, there is *Alice in Wonderland*.

Mirrors. Mysterious objects are they. Last night I dream I enter my former residence; it is filled with mirrors and, like catching someone's eye in a crowd, I glimpse Noonie's face in these mirrors a domestic walkabout. Waking this morning my mirror steams up. I didn't leave the bathroom door open, nor turn on the exhaust fan. A steamed up mirror is a *tabula rasa*, a gessoed canvas, a "mystic pad" in the sense that Freud elaborated on. I often use it to trace fugitive asemic scribbles, a kind of art-and-writing where pulse and movement of the line is primary, meaning implied but never decipherable. Pure Asemic writing is the total dissolution of the text, leaving traces of the human hand. These works occupy the space between the initial visual text and the pure asemic result. They reflect memory loss, partial comprehension of meaning and non-verbal sensory input.



Picky's "mystic pad," an instance of Picky's asemic writing.



Native American Ledger Art (various types of documents are overwritten by the artist).

They reflect memory loss, partial comprehension of meaning and non-verbal sensory input. So I again take advantage of my "mystic pad," producing this fine New Mexican morning what looks like the left hand of a right-handed hand of a blind-drunk blind woman attempting Arabic script for the 1st time. Maybe my cryptic marks can keep COVID XIX at bay, block him from entering my house, forestalling him groping my lungs.

> Noonie introduced me to the aesthetic delights of the asemic through the wonderful "Black Board Series" paintings by painter Cy Twombly and Cecil Touchon's palimpsestbased asemic writing in which he overwrites texts as found in 19th and early 20th century antique poetry books, a book of sermons, farm journal pages, a postcard, a grade school autograph book page, and so forth. Native American Ledger art possesses something of this overwriting aesthetic, but is

more explicit in meaning. And lastly, the artwork of Rosaire Appel, to whom Noonie was attracted due to her use of fragments. He gave me a poster of her *Beach Language* (2011) for my birthday. Fragments of branches, seaweed, leaves, and traces in beach sand are photographed, then arranged in a grid.

In such various works, these aforementioned asemic-oriented artists unlock the *power of the illegible*; that is, the power of the unconscious. In a fortuitous toss of the cosmic dice today, a pop-up ad on my browser page urges me to buy Peter Schwenger's book *Asemic: the Art of Writing* (2019): "You don't want to miss this collection of images that explore the silent space between and around words."

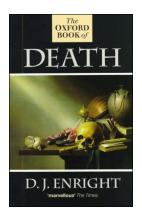
I order it. Noonie would have.



It is noon. I lie down to time-travel in my chaise longue. It's curved shape leans me back in a spaceman-about-to-blast-off position. I am thinking about Noonie, input his password NOMBAS/BOMBAS — his feigned childhood stomach disturbance only suffered at bedtime, only cured by a gulp of water and hugs by Mom and Dad — and am in the presence of absence. I take his biography and shatter it, then picky out the bits and pieces, holding them

to the light of my mind to see how they glitter and gleam.

To many, Noonie is just another dead white male. While alive there was much envy and enmity nipping at his heels. What made him write? "My hatred of my father; wanted to give me a wedding ring when I graduated from highschool." I regret now never having asked him "How is your writing going?" We did like being *flâneurs* in our own town, if not writers. Noonie often had earworms. "Replay the song 100 times. Perfect anodyne," I tell him. A strange call breaks my reveries. Wife #1 from the Midwest. "La Vie en Rose" playing in the background on a flute, *molto giocoso*. She says she just recovered from The Virus and feels compelled to thank me for the 20 years plus I cared tenderly for Noonie. Insisted she never harbored any ill feeling toward him. But she didn't come to the funeral. I asked why. Defended her decision by claiming "I want to keep him intact as a hologram in my mind." Seeing his remains would've quashed that, I guess. A wave of suicides by authors, so the news says. They never tell you how many suicides among the lower economic classes. Noonie pondered: "How many jumpers, mid-air, regret their decision?" Getting old seemed to be harder for you, Noonie, than for other people. Is that why you



insisted on dyeing your hair? Then you, all of you, died. I found *The Oxford book of Death* on your desk. I put my full trust in 1 man, you, Noonie. I recall your last haircut. Surprisingly, you had the stylist change from a #4 guard on his clippers to a #2, snipping your hair shorter, to an 1/8-inch length. A length that, claims *AARP* magazine, is all the vogue with males over 70 who, statistically, *tend to be more vigorous than their peers*. Was that shorter snip meant to symbolize you were cutting your life short due to Chad Armbuster's curse: "I am The Centripetal, all can find their kin within me; *you*, you are centrifugal and escape my concerns!" Or was it a strange coincidence, a signal you missed, that Chad was going to have his minions cut your semester short with a "vertical

vacation"? Or was it merely that you were going to amp up your gym routine, shed another 5 pounds, fit the *AARP* profile? To impress me. It's the not knowing. That hurts.



Picky's "War Rug" purchased in Santa Fe.

Those last months. Noonie, you were at war with Chad, with yourself, even at times with me. Strange that the last exhibition we see together before your demise was "From Combat to Carpet: The Art of Afghan War Rugs" at the Villa Terrace Decorative Art Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Such "war rugs" gained international attention following the Soviet invasion there in 1979 when millions of refugees fled to neighboring Pakistan and Iran. The unique subset of handwoven rugs we stare with amazement at teaches us about the innovative nature of rug design and production. We learn, as well, the long history of foreign involvement in Afghanistan. We connect deeply, exchange views.

In an adjoining gallery, we marvel at fiver fiber artist Leonore Tawney's *Dark River* (1962) in her retrospective show "Lenore Tawney: Mirror of the Universe" (died 2007, age 100). I am drawn to the deft way she creates a selvage edge, at times repeating the same knot, perfectly, over 100s of threads, how she uses a single type of yarn to elevate the work's formal aspects. You are curious, appreciative, but your knowledge of fiber arts is limited to "I know what I like, what I dislike." I enjoy teaching you, like you teach me at photography exhibitions. These moments of sharing are precious. We both know it.

Strange roll of the cosmic dice brings the magical Afghan rugs flying here to The Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA), but it closes prematurely under the Reign of COVID XIX. I get in prior to

the museum shutting its doors. Each rug I re-see connects me to *us* that day viewing that particular weaving that Sunday, the day we also drove by the hospital where you were born,



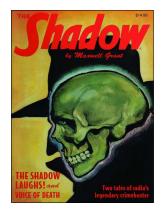
and then dined at Mader's German Restaurant where a tall, thin, disgruntled man stood arms akimbo over you, yelling, mistaking you for his doctor who "When I tried to make an appointment, I was told you were out of town." You had to show him your driver's license. You ordered the oxtail soup and sauerbraten, washed down with a Weissbier served in a German "boot" glass. *Kinda looks like my old yellow Wellies*.

As I slowly weave through the rugs, they come alive. The tanks roll, the jets fly overhead, Screams. Gunfire. Blood. Two sides fighting it out in a Kali Yuga of the Mind. These silhouettes of warfare become 3-D shapes, slowly morphing

into pure abstractions, their colors dancing before me like a Dance of Death. An internal chaotic, demonic vision. Will these weavers now produce rugs, a kind of sympathetic magic to placate COVID XIX, yet another deadly force ravaging their country?

When I come back to full sense, I am sitting on a bench before a wall of these rugs. (Months later, I will buy a war rug from a local rug dealer.) I get up and walk over to the wall text, read the same curator's statement Noonie and I read in Milwaukee: *The emergence of war-related imagery in Afghan rug design has clearly aided the economic survival of area weavers and displaced craftspeople through years of armed conflict and cultural disruption. What war rugs mean to individual weavers is less understood. Are war rugs a celebration of modernity or a rejection of war? Are they a witness to shared trauma or a commercialization of violence? Are they testaments to ingenuity and a spirit of survival? Perhaps they are all of these things at once.*

Perhaps *they* are all of these things at once. I can understand that. Taking *they* to refer to the myriad of events I have undergone since Noonie's fall to a bloody death and wake, events whose various interpretations — many contradictory — are legion. Is this my "Wake?" Buddhists say "Buddha" means "The Wake".



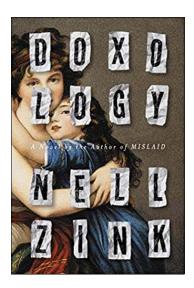
Suddenly. I wake from my noon(ie) escape, the chirps of an orange-bellied bird in my newly leaved aspen. My readjusting eyes barely focus a fleeting shadow moving across my backyard's brown adobe wall, a shadowy figure in a flowing kimono — Bash ? — or maybe it's the cape of "The Shadow," 'who knows'! No. It's an infestation of 100s of moths, swarming en masse across my field of vision, a live version of avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage's 4 minute, 1963 film, *Mothlight*, or a replay of Val's trip to see lepidopteral hoards in Michoacán. I flee into my house, followed by 20 crazed Kamikazes.

Doxology: private novelist, the wall-creeper, mislaid nicotine. Sounds like a good opening gambit for a novel whose protagonist is a downwardly mobile Asian woman with a lesbian mother, seeking love (of any type) during a biocrisis; she's a lazy, late-20s millennial poet, sardonic, facetious, and a chain-smoker. She wills her body to be wraithlike. Not sodden, not heavy, not dead, but filled with crackling, electric life, like a stale Marlboro on fire. Her living space suffers, like mine, from a life of hoarding and disorganization.



My garage bookshelves and accumulated mess, nines month after moving in.

So reads, left to right, 5 book spines crammed on my bookshelves in a garage crammed with



I-do-not-know-what-to-do-with items from my move here. All Nell Zink novels. Zink, 55, writes 5 novels in 5 years, the 5th being *Doxology*. Probably why Noonie bought me this set for our anniversary, the last we'd share together. All those 5s. And *doxology* referring to "a short hymn of praise."

I haven't read them, the novels. I only read about 50% of the books Noonie gifts me with. A kind of rebellion, I guess. Not wanting to take a *male's* implied advice: "Read this, woman!" In college, teacher "A" assigns us, say "Book X". In another class, teacher "B" assigns us "Book Y". I would read both books, but pretend I was rebelling against teacher "A" by reading teacher "B's" assigned book, and vice versa.

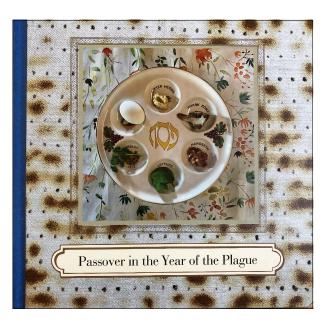


A plague of Miller moths have infested my trees. It looks like a highly magnified view of COVID virus cells expelled from a carrier's cough.

Thanks to the shutin, I've become a *wallcreeper*, moving about the house, sweeping up dust, straightening pictures, wiping dust off their frames, brushing away cobwebs, wiping stains off walls from flattening more than a few invasive moths crawling up them with the most recent issue of *Vogue* magazine. While I am performing these sacred duties of the hearth, I compensate by throwing a

wild party in my mind, cramming in colorful characters with no taboos. Crazy mothers. Thoughts about shamanism, pragmatism, and anarchy. That's also a good description of Nell Zink's fiction, or so notes critic Philip Oltermann: "Her debut novel, *The Wallcreeper*, moved from birdwatching to anal sex within the opening seven pages." Wow! It's taken me 7 weeks to go from relatively normal to the shaken state I am in today.

It usually wouldn't be my cup of tea, but locked up in here all day . . . Moreover, I have a selfish motive: Zink has a working relationship with Dorothy: A Publishing Project, a small press that specializes in women's writing. Just maybe *Picky Hunting* would be



picked up by this press. Checking out Zink's material in small doses might give me ideas, a key to success. Getting this journal of a plague year published. So think Zink. After all, Zink seemed to come out of nowhere to become celebrated for her work at an age older than most literati.

Speaking of books, my POD photobook, *Passover in the Year of the Plague* (2020) has finally arrived from Shutterfly, weeks after I created it. I use a Matzo cover image and endeavor to document all the recipes and finished dishes I prepare and then have to eat *alone*.



Two-page spread in my Passover photobook with recipe for this brisket dish on the right-hand page.



Prior to the lockdown, I invited my Santa Fe realtor and his wife, their friends (originally from Oak Park, but I did not know there), Mazatl and his wife who works for my realtor, to what I envisioned as a Super Seder (but would've become a Super Spreader). Noonie's absence would be marked by lighting his memorial candle. Then — oy vey! — a plague of Biblical proportions knocks at our doors, COVID infesting

us like those millions of Miller moths born of the tent caterpillar invasion a few weeks ago. So, yeah, my best laid plans — QUASHED. At least when this catastrophe hits, my iPhone and i Pad are fully charged, locked 'n loaded — does that sound sort of right-wing?

Viruses (micro) and moths (macro) — I can't help but draw parallels between these overwhelming events. Not to mention the background — heat waves, violent storms, flooding, lightning strikes, tornados, blizzards, hurricanes — against which these miseries play out across our globe. The planetary tantrum: CLIMATE CHANGE. Nearly all we now know about global warming was known by 1979. People now talking about the future in the past tense. There is always weather in the background, whether or not we acknowledge it. (Noonie always acknowledged it, obsessed over it.) The weather, the sky, in the background of this journal is 90% clear blue like Noonie's eyes. Why I moved here.



If I could put big billboard up... but our H.O.A. would have none of it. Too bad, as many cars and 4×4 trucks circulate about our winding streets in Aldea, the newness and make of the vehicle determining the distance of the occupants to the world about them.

I am reading Charles Wright's poems, poems with references to the sky: clouds, birds, moon, trees (not moth infestations). Thanks Noonie. He gifted me with this book of Wright's poems. He knew Charles and his wife, Holly, a fine art photographer, well. She photographed

Noonie in the guise of St. Francis for her series on "Present-day Saints". Holly's father (John McIntyre) and mother (Jeanette Nolan) were noted Hollywood character actors. McIntyre was a favorite of Noonie's, especially as the sheriff in *Psycho* and Elvis Presley's father in *Flaming Star* (1960). That dark film's title song of the same name deeply affected Noonie, what with its plea for a death deferred:

[Verse 1]

Every man, has a flaming star A flaming star, over his shoulder And when a man, sees his flaming star He knows his time, his time has come

[Chorus]

Flaming star, don't shine on me, flaming star Flaming star, keep behind me, flaming star There's a lot of living I've got to do Give me time to make a few dreams come true Flaming star...



He'd play this song over and over on YouTube innumerable times. Another reason I can't believe Noonie took a nose dive onto Mich Ave. on his own. Besides, he liked pizza, especially pizza as the Romans do it, too much to willingly violate the integrity of that food by becoming sidewalk pizza himself.



Social distancing tables at a restaurant in Maryland.



One of the positive effects of the pandemic is it has delayed most of the incessant political commercials we are plagued with as we near an election. Instead, we are being fed an ongoing deluge of pandemic ads that incorporate very similar themes: beginning with slow-playing piano music with constant reminders that we are in this together. "During these difficult times. . . . "In times like these. . . ." "During these troubled times." "Challenging times. . . ." "Trying times. . . ." "Unprecedented times. . . ." And the most ubiquitous, "In these uncertain times..." These may be uncertain times — a time of increasing tosses of the cosmic dice - but that doesn't mean there aren't things of which I am certain.

I am certain that the Immanent Baboon becomes more ludicrous each day. I am tired to hearing him pronounce China as CHY-nah. I am certain the moth infestation is beginning to drive me crazy. My death count from yesterday? Thirty-two. I am washing my hands of moth gore more frequently than I am to forestall the virus. I am certain I am tired of fixing dinner each night, so I am finding my way more frequently to eateries that offer carry-out. I have Lu Lu's Chinese, of course, but now I am desperately seeking pizza. I wish these venues also offered carry-out dinner companions. The dogs don't make the best conversationalists.

There is talk about our Governor opening some establishments with novel ideas for social distancing, as the innertube/mobile tables offered at a Maryland

restaurant. These funny, yet effective "bumper-car" walkers should be used in grocery stores and elder homes, too. Sign me up.



Pandemic news fragments: a man has used the pandemic as a way to veil his wife's murder; street-racing and traffic violations are up, leading to a 40% rise in traffic deaths; Trump is taking Hydroxychloroquine; a Santa Fe man is facing assault charges after police say he intentionally coughed on people inside a store; many churches and shrines remain closed; H.O.A. authorities ask us community members to be patient concerning the moth infestation; there are doubts the annual fall season's Zozobra festival will be permitted this year. Zozobra is a 50-foot high marionette effigy — built and burned at the annual Fiestas de Santa Fe — that embodies gloom; by burning him, people send their worries and troubles of the previous year into the flames. I vote to have it. We need symbolic release for

our psyche (as the Immanent Baboon said of our need for sports to resume).



Sports. Noonie hated organized sport, I hate *all* forms of it. Can't pronounce even the word *sports* without gagging. I have developed, over the years, 100 excuses for not walking on any particular day: too many moths, high winds, sun too bright, sun not bright enough, threatening skies, too many jet

contrails, just washed my hair, haven't washed my hair yet, the dogs already crapped in the garden, my foot hurts, my hip hurts. Moss is roaming about with his vicious dog, too many dog-walkers plodding about. I am expecting a package delivery. I need to binge-watch "Judge Judy" — as Noonie liked to do with *Law and Order*, whose 465 episodes, he said, were "numerically significant because of the consecutive numbers adding to 15 (5+5+5)." I have new plants to plant. I am expecting a call from both of my hard-to-get off-the-phone friends. The grandkids are supposed to FaceTime me, but I'm on forever-hold with CareMark Pharmacy re: a prescription screw-up. I am on Facebook, posting and replying to posts by friends (most of whom have as their profile photos either their pets or portraits taken when in their 30s). Overload. My brain's neuronal connections are shorting out. *And so it goes*.

8.0



Tree of Life wall mural, Madrid, New Mexico.

A 100 moths around me about to dissolve me, like *Star Trek*'s transporter device, into particles. I feel the pull into a more dispersed mode of being penetrating all creation. I almost welcome it, but run at the last moment, frantically waving my arms around my head.

I've been so long isolated in my home, the outline of my life and time and daily events blur. Even the divide between nature and culture blurs. It is as if the high desert is thirsty, wants to absorb me. Like the Native Americans here who have been absorbed centuries ago and are part of the land. Practice the Eagle Way of the Sacred Pipe.

During my afternoon nap on my chaise longue, I dream that a great moth settles on my forehead. It flutters upward, startled by the approach of a glow warm and radiant. A figure slowly materializes before me, the shape of Noonie oddly garbed as a Navajo shaman, gesticulating about him, announcing: "I am Noonie Catches, you see me standing here beside you, and hear the true grain

of my voice; but I tell you that all these things — yes, from that star that has just shone out in the sky to the solid ground beneath our feet, to that spinach quiche you made last night — I say that all these are but dreams and shadows; the shadows that hide the real world from our eyes. There is a real world, but it is beyond this glamour and this vision, beyond them all as beyond a veil. I do not know whether any human being has ever lifted that veil. "But if you are picky, choose to reside in the just right abode, you may look out just the right window and see a panorama of unearthly, astounding beauty. Everything spins and unspins. Everything ends in mystery." This is delivered with a staring expression that suggests Noonie Catches is looking into/at somewhere else.

"I dance. I shuffle. The Tarot card, The Empress, indicates that your ideas should finally be realized in the material plane. Your mind will be full of original ideas. The Empress is also a sign of fertility and growth, so in a romantic context, it may indicate the

arrival of a long lasting love. (No, I don't mind, really.) The Empress is the upcoming materialization of your ongoing projects: professional contracts, association with other people, finding a job, intellectual achievements, and social recognition. So I suggest it would do you much good to re-read *The Teachings of Don Juan, Gargantua and Pantagruel* and *The Pickwick Papers*. In that order. As for your future publisher, forget Dorothy, a Publishing Project and go with the Brits at Strange Attractor Press. Gotta run."



Stats: post-truth, post-sham politics.

A prescription received in my dream, I awake with a start. And a new start to this book, maybe: I shall never again see this land as clearly as during this, my first year. The mountains either too far or too close. The charisma of the chamisa. What is it which sets travelers to altering their schedules and overstaying, or buying a home here, like me?

The chamisa plants smell rotten. Almost no one is coming here now. Public parks are closed. House sales are down to nil. Someone did arrive and rented a condo near me, Texans, but they were blasted on our NextDoor online community by some locals for possibly bringing disease our way. But, overall, the pandemic is successfully being contained here thanks to our Democratic Governor. And polls today

show, happily, that the Immanent Baboon's approval ratings are diving down.

Aldea's NextDoor is a godsend during this crisis. I can obtain the latest information about the virus, about new policies in our community, what do to about the moth infestation, how to prepare for the next invasion (the tarantulas are coming!), what service men are legit, and police activity in and around our area:

Helicopter and police cars on La Tierra road last night. Why?

Last night around 12:30 a.m. police vehicles were cruising La Tierra road and shining spotlights into my back yard and surrounding areas. About 40 min later a helicopter arrived and did the same. I'm at Foxtail Circle in Tierra Del Oro. The State Police and Sheriff office would not divulge why.

I've got a new 40s-something friend! "I go by the moniker 'Vitalina,' 'cause I got energy, vitality, charisma, 'n punched a cowboy who tried to give me a cigar in a tampon wrapper." We connect after I post a friend request on "PussyRiotPenPalAnyoneSFNM?" The only legit response I get. Lives close, too! Is a Pink BitTorrent of information. After some funny exchanges about a black goat wandering into her garden — the proper owner eventually found — she gets personal. "The first gal I'd heard confess she loved masturbating invited me to a Zen temple, but my folks nixed it." Reveals she was born "intersex" to a 45-year-old Creole-Choctaw mother and a 21-year-old Mexican-American Jewish father (a crypto-Jew!) who had a 1-nighter under a table at a Ray Charles concert at the Hollywood Palladium. She once guided tours at the Conspiracy Museum in Dealy Plaza and is a selfmade poet with "a readiness to admit failure" and "opens a book like it's a vagina". B.F.A. from UNM (studied under artists Basia Irland and Native American Jaune Quick-To-See-Smith); is a vblogger and performance artist, stage name "Barbie Plenty Horses," but makes her living by modeling for artists. During the pandemic, with no work, she passes time watching DVDs and reading. This week she's digesting Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*:

V: Didja know that Sontag's title's initials read *IAM*? Like, 'I write, therefore I am.' Get it? Fighting the Not-Am of death.

P: Could be just short for IAMBIC, as in iambic pentameter. LOL.

V: I could be dead. I'm a teenage cancer survivor. That's when I started writing poetry. When the real world's too scary we take refuge in a version of it, creating not *the* truth, but *my* truth. Why I write poems. My memories are in my poems, but I AM *not* in my poems. So *there*, Susan!

P: My memories, alas, are dead certainties lumbering onto center stage.

V: Sontag's dead, of course, of myelodysplastic syndrome, which evolved into acute myelogenous leukemia. BTW, are you sick yet of dudes in hoodies driving 4 x 4's with monster exhaust rockets blasting like a Mount Vesuvius?

P: Road killers with a chip on their . . .

V: And then there are Lamborghinis, 'Lambo's', and self-driving Teslas.

P: Oh, yah. Those folks think themselves 'Quite the cache.'

V: Yah, so it goes. For me theses luxury conveyance symbolize the aboutto-happen sick wreck of 'capitalist realism' [Mark Fisher]. People are always buying those hotrods, smashing up, killing themselves trying to impress someone.

P: Noonie, my late hubby, told me of such an incident in Southern California when he was there visiting his elderly mom. The victim was a Highway Patrol officer, no less. Killed his friend riding with him, too. Shit.

V: Shit, yah. A highway cop. Shoulda known better. Must've saved for years to buy that fucker, too. A victim of 'emotional capitalism' [Eva Illouz].

P: Tired to taking shit from the Hollywood movie types he'd ticketed for speeding over the years. Wanted to show them up. Type of guy who would've voted for Trump. Like my neighbor Matt who parks his noisy Lambo in the alley near me. I was ambushed by him at our mailbox station. God! His small talk ran five-sizes too large. Overall, I felt like I was being interviewed for a job. Asked all about my 'skill-set.' What car did I drive? Did I like 'Beaners'? Was believing in the future only 'an easy way out'? Shit like that.

V: God, Picky, someone should do his tires — STAB . . . STAB — then Silence of the Lambo. LOL.

P: BTW. My little white lamb, my westie dog, Snowy, chased down and ate a moth! Actually, got a pair of them. Got a cute video of it, too. It's things like that . . . well . . . they really pink a day's edges, right?

V: A bitch, I hope? Put her on your Facebook. Say, that last line re: *pink*, Picky, was nice. Do you write much?

P: Uh-huh. I am trying to keep a sort of journal of this plague year during which the shit keeps hitting the fan. And you? [*This is where Vita opens up about her complex origins, intersex, feminist art, love life.*]

Vita and I make virtual contact in the morning,. I am sitting in my large TV chair in my robe, iPad in hand, dogs at my feet. She chides me about my online consumerism, my dip into "emotional capitalism" where money and affect meet. I've admitted to this unwokeness in an earlier exchange. She makes scathing remarks about the "toxic consumerism abetted by the internet, politicians, Texas blondes, and businessmen," going on to say, "the self-perpetuating demi-god-in-a-sweat-drenched hoodie culture is cause and effect of a lack of gender diversity in high-tech jobs." She goes on to attack "the portrayal of many personified tech products as a servile female, like Amazon's Alexa. People are naming their daughters after 'her' and daughter's are naming their dolls Alexa, too. Crazy."

I hadn't thought of that. Vita has a point. Noonie mostly likely mused over that issue, not bringing it up to me, knowing the screaming matches between *moi* and my 1st husband over my voracious spending habits. Vita goes on to recommend books (weirdest was *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* by Mario Perniola) and movies (including DVDs ordered through Netflix) appropriate for our state of captivity, explaining their appropriateness:

Picky, check these out: Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" (obvious); Luis Buñuel's *Exterminating Angel* (people mysteriously trapped in a house); Jean-Luc Godard's Film Socialisme (action situated on a cruise ship, like the ones plagued with COVID now; much topical footage, both moving and still; words are spoken, some of them bits of language from eminent authors; these words appear in uppercased subtitles and are mostly nouns; Godard explained they are what he calls "Navaho English." Guess he learned it from old Westerns; his "Navajo speakers" touch on socialism, gambling, nationalism, Hitler, Stalin, art, Islam, women, Jews, Hollywood, Palestine, war and other large topics); Katherine Anne Porter's Pale Horse, Pale Rider (no, not the Clint Eastwood film; a 1939 collection of 3 short novels about lovers during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic); Jack Kerouac's 1965 book Desolation Angels (Kerouac takes a job as an isolated fire lookout at Desolation Peak, Washington); lastly, Roman Polanksi's 1962 masterpiece Knife in the Water (for the tensions that arise between 2 men and 1 woman crammed into a small sailboat, where the guys perform a weird Freudian "knife-game" of oneupmanship. I sometimes, slowly though, just to exorcize tension, play that dangerous game, too). Finally, see Takashi Miike's Audition, about a widower doing videotaped auditions for the role of his new wife. The woman he finally chooses lives in an apartment empty except for a telephone and a man tied up in a burlap sack. Pure sick surrealism, Picky. Speaking of auditioning, have you checked out Carbon-14 Dating.com yet? A video-dating site specifically for people, like you, over 75 and petrifying — oh, sorry.



I write her back that Noonie already turned me on to his DVD of Polanski's film with its superb black-andwhite cinematography, those dark skies, stark white clouds; how Noonie repeatedly looped the knife-game scene with the rival macho men stabbing a knife between their spread fingers with increasing speed. A Freudian symbol, its sexual implications, are obvious, too obvious. Noonie tried the trick once. Never again.

I write Vita that Noonie, over the years, cobbled together a wide variety of DVDs which I inherit in a large box labeled 4-TEOTWAWKI (For The End Of The World As We Know It). Tells me he wants to "find things worthy of protection," like DVDs, that are "hedges for the apocalypse. Of any impending disaster." He boasts, "I'm

ready, Picky — *bring it on*!" Me? I'm not.

Vita, half-joking suggests: "Picky, troll a Survivalist Singles dating site. Find a frontiersman eager to take care of you. Girl, the potential for social

chaos is increasing. Fat, lazy, weak men, addicted to TV, porn, and sports, gossip, material and status gain are legion. You'll need to grok the jargon: WROL = without rule of law; SHTF = shit hits the fan. A PREPPER = a survivalist. He can easily ward off nefarious intruders as food and tempers run short, breadlines long, breathing labored, lungs choking on frozen prayer, and Clorox sells for \$100 a gallon."

I playfully heed her advice, seconded by Lu Lu's Chinese fortune cookie's message for the day. I put on my tight purple plastic gloves, something about going to a strange site where ex-cops, fishy self-made heirs to family fortunes, and crazy Unabomber types might be trolling. Oooh! Eeek! Ugh! Yike! Oof! Can't be too picky, scrolling through the Survivalist Singles page. I peruse a panoply of awkward selfies of pallid, sallow, and shockingly hirsute faces with tags like "Sarge," "Marginale," and "George Prepared" (Noonie was a devoted George Peppard fan). The latter, titling his post "Re: Doubt," pleads his romantic case:



George Prepared.

Veteran, now an engineer, self-sufficient in our dark days. This global pandemic, this breakdown of the current system, not a bad thing, an opportunity! Farming, arming, bars and barter our future. I survive/thrive in my Idaho redoubt. Let Prepared attend to our OPSEC [operations security]. I like Scrabble, sex, and spanakopita, not necessarily in that order. Life is tough, we can be tougher — together! Like Lewis and Clark? I got copies of their maps. BTW: I killed, skinned, and dined on bear last week with my Pfeifer-Zeliska Nitro Express Revolver. Cubed beaver meat stew today. Have many traps set for those critters. Their hides sell well as well. Wanna bearskin carpet? Apply here.

Talking about a different *Umwelt*! I head for the kitchen to wash my hands with my special chemical concoction. *Maybe I should patent it*? Go on "Shark Tank" for investors.

* *

5:05 p.m. Time to feed the dogs. Then walk them, getting the mail. I hope Matt isn't keeping an eye out for my daily trip to box 5B (I vary the times I go). I don my sunhat, put white gauze around my neck to prevent a sun rash flaring up, hook up the mutts to the split red leash and march on. Luckily, Matt's exhausted-noisy red Lambo has flown-the-coop.

About halfway through the walk, coming up a long gradual hill to the community's plaza with its western town look, I see on the door of 1 of the now-closed businesses a disturbing sign. It concerns some minor vandalism (see below). This business owner, "B.C. Daystar," is always posting odd, controversial information, creating a kind of out-spoken Outsider Art display before her place of business. Really, it's good for a laugh, shouldn't evoke hostile reactions. So this violation of her free speech is quite disconcerting.



Yes. It is not all utopia and homemade spirituality here.



My walk takes me and my canine entourage uphill past cactus, a lonely tumble weed, newly flowering irises, decorative rocks, up to the community's playground. Screaming kids. I stand for a short time watching their game of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy: 20 children group (6 feet apart) in a circle around a chrome steel tower; a ball is thrown up so as to land on the platform at the top of the tower from where it rolls down into the interior, falls on a rapidly revolving disk (like a roulette wheel), and is hurled through 1 or other of the numerous

apertures pierced in the cylindrical casing; may the quickest kid catch it! For a split second I'm again seeing my grown sons as children.

Sauntering downhill toward home, wind in my face, I spy a heart-shaped prickly pear cactus. I bend close. New growth bursting from that heart. Love and the pricks. Life. I take a shot. The dogs tug me toward a new path, large stones laid on colorful gravel. I assume they are searching for a place to squat. They drag me to a large flat walking stone. Embedded on it are plant-leaf silhouettes, traced by the sun like a photogram, like those initial shadow images of vegetation made by William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of the calotype. I bend and take a carefully framed shot, recording the shadow of the recorder, much as Noonie's photographer friend, Lewis Koch, did in a similar looking photograph.



In Lieu of Lew (2020) Picky Hunting.

A prized image in Noonie's art collection. When Lew gifts him with it, he excitedly tells me, "It reveals photography's *essence* — in a Heideggerian sense — its inner possibility." Meaning, I think, that this image reveals the photographer's mode of being-in-the-world, shows the photographic intending of the world as to-be-photographed-by-the-photographer, who is also the subject here. The photograph is asserted as a sort of *membrane* that simultaneously separates and connects photographer and object photographed. Or simply put, this is a photograph about photographing, framing something (a subtractive process), that opens itself up to be recorded. Photography as "enactment-thinking," to borrow from Heidegger. That image now hangs in my office.



Minneapolis (2013) Lewis Koch.

A quarter of a century of exposure to Noonie's luminous thinking on art and literature left its traces. I look at the world about me as *possibility*. Especially now. The inner possibility of a thing is what Heidegger, as many other philosophers have, says is the essence of a thing. In my current life I want an increasing moving-out-of-self, a moving out in front of things. An attuning. Making photographs enacts that pulsing motion for me. I've found in my clinical practice over the years, and in my more recent desire to photograph, an opening out toward the *revealedness* of things, as opposed to the flat, prosaic know-it-all and nothing-but-knowing mode that merely masters things. The latter falls under the category of ambition. I think it the highest wisdom to be a nobody in a relative paradise such as surrounds me here than a celebrity in a whacked out world bereft of values.



Clouds as seen on my dog walk looking east toward the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

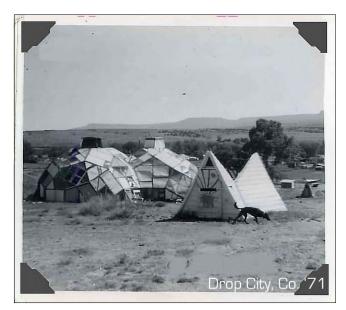
Picky, Picky, Picky. Prunes, prunes, eat your prunes. I have to run these mental notes through my mind otherwise I forget. Especially in the a.m., before my cup of coffee. I make my spinach and mushroom omelette. I forego watching the morning news in favor of no words, no questions, no pronouncements. Only light. I sit at my round sturdy wooden kitchen table with curved wrought iron spine legs superbly crafted by Leonel Capparelli's workshop for his furniture store, Hands of America. I sit opposite a multicolored vase of

white roses clipped from my garden. I sniff them. I sniff my breakfast as I wait for it to cool and watch the clouds gathering over the Sangre de Cristos. Thick, dark, cumulus. Over my left shoulder, back northward toward the Jemez range, the sky is a clear blue. Two weather zones dance about me. This drama in the skies carries on all day with, at times, a virga, a streak of precipitation falling from a cloud that evaporates before reaching the ground. During the time it takes me to eat, the skies run a gamut of moods.

Since I've moved here, I have become more aware of the range of my moods. Being in some mood or other is, according to Heidegger, fundamental to our existence. In other words, it is essential to the distinctively human way of having a world. Moods, says Heidegger, constitute a sense of being part of a world that is pre-subjective and preobjective. All states of mind and all perceptions and cognitions of external things presuppose this background sense of belonging to a world. Santa Fe is my new world.

An Unwelt I am also exploring textually (since I am house-bound) through an anthology of writing on New Mexico, The Spell of New Mexico, edited by Tony Hillerman (best known for his Navajo Tribal Police mystery novels). The editor's superb selection is aimed at sketching the effect New Mexico has made on various author's minds. D. H. Lawrence in Taos ("[I]t was New Mexico, that liberated me from the present era of civilization, the great era of material and mechanical development," and "the ancients [the Indigenous Peoples] saw, consciously, as children now see unconsciously... [their] compelling emotions must have been emotions of wonder, fear, and admiration." Those are my emotions, too. Mabel Dodge Luhan, in Lorenzo in Taos (1932), says of Lawrence: "Here is the only one who can really see this Taos country and the Indians . . . For Taos had something wonderful in it, like the dawn of the world." Even C. G. Jung gets a voice here discussing an enlightening clash of Umwelts experienced during his visit (1924-25) between his European self and the Chief of the Taos Pueblo whose culture "floated freely on deep and alien seas." Both authors see the accessible, knowable, and fixable, Heidegger's "readyat-hand," must be challenged by a deeper mystery, a mystery well-represented in Southwest Native American culture.

This morning I am in a good mood. My omelette the best. The coffee, a Dark Piñon K-cup, grabs my taste buds. I await the buzz. I muse. I am willing to rethink my harsh comments about the Survivalists, like George Prepared. Aren't they akin to people like Helen and Scott Nearing who authored *Living the Good Life* (1954), describing their 20 years spent home-steading in the Green Mountains of Vermont? Or, during the '60s, like the hippies who ran off to communes such as Drop City in Trinidad, Colorado, or Big Sur, California?





Henry Miller moves to Partington Ridge, Big Sur in 1947 and writes about his experiences of both isolation and community there. In the 1960s, he sympathizes with 1960's rebellious youth. In his earliest days there, he had no electricity, no butane tank, no refrigeration, no car. Only a cart and himself, a human donkey, as motive power to haul groceries and his mail up and down a steep climb. And his social milieu was far from ideal, too: "Yes, the times are bad," he writes," permanently bad --unless one becomes immune ..."

Miller was surely what today we'd call a Survivalist enjoying his isolation from the daily grind of city life, loving the weather's dance between sunshine and fog, the peace, the contentment of beach, mountains with their tall coast redwoods.

"Artists never thrive in colonies. Ants do," he writes in *Big Sur and After*, where he

encounters sophisticated children and adult innocents; geniuses, cranks and the unclassifiable. Of the Nearings, Miller says they explore an attitude toward human experience rooted in simple physical and economic arrangements which could turn life into something of a moral and aesthetic necessity, into a harmony and balance not easily achieved in city life. Hippies — they flocked to Taos — being not so different.

Miller and the Nearings, Survivalists *avant la lettre*; albeit, they did not share the extreme sense of impending doom, paranoia, and gun culture characteristic of today's "prepper" culture which is often hostile to art and artists. Interestingly, the 1st to crack under the stress of the COVID lockdown are those damn gun-toting preppers, protesting the lockdown, the social distancing! Wimps!

Well, there again, I've talked myself back into agitated thoughts about today's Survivalists and the paranoid mythosphere in which they exist. I'm still in a good mood, though. I can cite Miller with great vigor this morning being, as he liked to say, "full of piss and vinegar." I heed his own advice to himself: "Brace up, me bucko, and unloose the subjunctives!"



Hi-Ho! Silver! Away! But away to where? Galisteo Basin Petroglyphs? Nice choice. Not too far away. Rocks with something akin to asemic writing to attract my camera-eye. But I am alone and that area is desolate. I wouldn't feel safe — car trouble, I fall off a rock, twist my ankle, a rattle-snake encounter, a *bandido*, COVID symptoms start suddenly, an alien abduction, an irate land-owner chases me off his land with a shotgun unless I had Prepper Girl to watch my back.





So am staying at home today, like yesterday. and the day before. and the day before that. Which means I am eventually going to watch "Good Morning America" and see what new outrages are being reported by masked news people.

Oh yes, it's all about Millennials crowding, no face masks, laughing, whistling past the graveyard. Brazil has the highest number of cases after the U.S.; mass graves being dug. The Brazilian President, like Trump, indifferent to the human suffering. Trump chiding Biden for wearing a mask, blasting Twitter for checking the facts of his tweets. Nothing really new here! The Immanent Baboon climbing his tree again and thumping on his chest.

I take my 3rd cup of coffee out to my

new chaise longue, toting a well-thumbed and red-underlined philosophy book of Noonie's, *Heidegger on Truth: Its Essence and Its Fate* by Graeme Nicholson. Thinking about Noonie's comments concerning Lewis Koch's photograph, which I mentioned earlier, I want

to review Heidegger's existentialist thinking about "being in the world" and "the truth of being." I sink into the soft cushion, adjust the pillow and begin flipping through the book's introduction. I flip to page 5, which Noonie has thumbed until the upper right edge is a dull gray and upon which he's penned:

MOST RELEVANT & IMPORTANT!!

Heidegger's thought can help us today. First of all, we are inclined in daily life to confine the phenomenon of truth too narrowly. The public in modern times tends to believe that many occasions of speech are not subject to a rule or norm of truth at all. When we are joking, or "telling tales out of school," we don't expect to have to defend our utterances: the norm of truth is felt to be a restriction on our freedom of utterance that applies only in certain situations. This common feeling reflects the deeper commitment of our society to freedom of speech, but this principle is commonly understood in our society to be a freedom of self-expression. Free self-expression cannot be constrained by truth. We commonly believe in people's right to assert themselves, to raise their profile, to advance their interests, and, today, to seek publicity with a website. Where does truth fit in with all this? This question gains in urgency when we review the record of the social media, where not only individuals, but also groups and causes, sometimes anonymous or pseudonymous, disseminate messages to the world, and make war with rivals, free of any form of control or supervision. The system is saturated either with "fake news" or with repeated allegations of "fake news." It seems that in our times truth has become an issue of political debate in a completely new way: not only in determining what is true, but also in doubting whether politics and journalism can even be governed by it. Some people now say that the postmodern age is the "post-truth age."



View from my chaise longue.

The discussion here is even more relevant under the Reign of COVID XIX and Trump's attack on the media. His attempt to spread untruth as truth. Like in Orwell's *1984* when Inner Party member O'Brien tests protagonist Winston Smith's allegiance to Party truth by demanding that Winston see 5 fingers, instead of the 4 he is holding up. The danger the Immanent Baboon presents to our society can't be underestimated.

I continue to sip my java, read Nicholson's close-reading of Heidegger, but lift my head occasionally to take note of nature greening and chirping about me in the midst of perfect silence as the warm New Mexican sun slowly creeps up my extended legs, warming my body. As I repeat reading, looking up, reading, looking up, a convergence between me "in-here" and nature "out-there" occurs. Something opens up. A "being-in".

Something *extra-retinal*. A kind of, how to describe it, like "skin vision". Suddenly my chest is my new point of view onto what is before me. I sense all the positions of the wildlife within a 55-yard circumference of my relaxed body flopped out on my tan chaise. An oceanic feeling arises. [In a 1927 letter to Sigmund Freud, Romain Rolland coined the phrase "oceanic feeling" to refer to a sensation of eternity, a feeling of "being one with the external world as a whole," inspired by the example of Ramakrishna and other mystics.]

I have felt something akin to this only once before: after imbibing 3 Saketini's during an Omakase "sushi-rage" at B. K. Park's famous Juno's Sushi in Chicago. It was



Mother's Day and I was given heart-shaped glasses for the event. Black sea bream wrapped around ankimo (monkfish liver); pickled chayote topped with a micro fava leaf; Osetra caviar; king crab served with uni miso, A5-wagyu butter and a potato chip; poached abalone braised with soy and XO sauce; sea bass with charred frisée and seaweed; chutoro (tuna) and smoked salmon sashimi; a variety of nigiri, duck, temaki, tamago, and a very yummy sweet ending passed my lips, as Noonie and my son and his wife cheered me on: "Eat, eat, eat and drink, drink, drink!"

Recently, my Chicago friends, eager to lure me

back after the lockdown, all rave about Park opening a 2^{nd} sushi place, Mako, in the fastgrowing West Loop in The Parker a glass luxury apartment building. The eatery was just awarded a Michelin star! How the lockdown will affect this venture remains yet to be seen. Hope it survives. They are doing delivery, though, so . . .

So many special times with Noonie at a variety of fine dining places in the West Loop area: Girl and the Goat, Leña Brava, Sushi Wabi, Momotaro, Avec, The Publican, Blackbird, Duck Duck Goat, and Moto (it had an edible menu, its chef later committed suicide). We came together over fine cuisine like no other couple we knew. This extreme foodie-ism, might it have something to do with our painful childhoods? A compensation. In Noonie's unfinished novel, he gives lampooning voice to the stresses of his early life:

Mommy, there's a mononster under my bed! I awake. Two pillows under my head. How many times have I awakened to this anxiety and still do? Vivid imagination where thought made it real. Me, the unfortunate son of an unfortunate mother and father. I was born aged three. Two weeks after birth I could designate things by one word: THAT. In six months I could say: "Sparrow goes cheep-cheep. Crow goes caw-caw. I go ma-ma." I believed a vampire was at my window. Deduced that my

body couldn't walk without my legs, and my legs couldn't walk without my body. At five I was fourteen and a helmsman at my own vessel's tiller, sussing out that people could have the word goodness in their mouths, all the while holding a bloody knife 'twixt their teeth.

Mommy. Mommy who brought me into the world against my wishes, who made me chronométrable [ed., mortal, thrown into time] but didn't give suckle, so I tippled on rubber. Mommy who let dad (who called me a "naughty boyble" and said I was not like his "bearfors") spank me and said I bawled like an adorable Wisconsin dairy calf when he did so. My dad, an authentic WWII Japanese torpedo, fully functional in shallow water, wanting to make a big splash 'n flash. Like lightning. Wishing, by Jove, for a Catholic son despite his Lutheran wife. Making our family's Jupiter jubilate.

"We'll hear about him in the headlines!" his father's father howled during my christening, "He's the type to percuss."

"At this age they're filthy, but honest. By the time they're teens, they're clean, but deceitful," added my mother's mother.

"He'll adore hashed brown potatoes," chimed in my mother's father. "That will reintegrate him with his workin'-on-da-railroad ancestors."

"No, he'll adore flapjacks," corrected my father's mother, "like his lumberjack ancestors. In fact, you should've named him Jack."

"He will adore both, becoming a wordsmith capable of turning armpits into turnspits, and will have many successful submissions to periodicals," corrected my prescient mother's mother's sister.

My parents had a helluva time bringing me up. "The little king, all he likes is ha-ha," father told mother. "Gaiety ready-to-hand and too smart for his britches too." So "Lord Haw-Haw" became my nickname, given me by my dad who remembered as a G.I. listening to the British turncoat, William Joyce, who hosted an infamous "Germany Calling" WWII propaganda radio program. Haw-Haw was known for his up-to-date intel and I had to be analogously on it, to survive the battle with my parents. Under parental and ecclesiastical thumb, my body was not mine to do with as I pleased: hands visible in public, ja!, in pubic nein! No wonder I'm even today too susceptible to embarrassment, awkwardness, and shame, and filled with neediness for fame, even while playing the academic game. Selfprotecting and as vulnerable as a hedgehog.

Hell, I miss Noonie. I miss his wit.What shall I have for lunch?Nothing too healthy.Those 5 leftover pork ribs?Yes. But only 2.

* * *

9.0



Death Cop. Trump equates this with making a mistake while golfing. Ever see a situation not made worse by a cop?

Zemblanity. Calamity. Hannity. Up the back alley to my mailbox. But not a journey, a dance. A dance of confusion and pain. The dogs and I run smack into Matt. No. He runs into *us*, backing his Lambo into my right leg and trick knee as the dogs scatter and I am propelled about as his car radio blares a satellite station's commentary by Sean Hannity concerning the Minneapolis police killing of George Floyd, resulting in riots and fires — near where my son hunkers down, stores in his locale torched.

"Take a big breath! Let it go! Don't get scared! Let's breathe toGETher! That's it!" He is out of his vehicle yelling at me to calm me down, taking large breaths to get me to do the same. "Sorry!" (Hannity is still blathering away over the airwaves through all this.) Leaning his long self toward me, he assures me, "I live a very clean truth, I swear." He isn't wearing a protective mask. Neither am I. As he gets closer, I awkwardly dance

further away. The dogs are spinning around me, tangling their leash. Too bad no one is iPhone-recording this. Now showing a smidgen of fear, he pleads: "Let's not turn a hiccup into an infection." At this I look him in the eye, imagine hearing his ex-wife yelling at him as she goes out the door with a suitcase: *You! You who shot your sperm into me, you never set me free. Presto! I now free myself.* As if reading my mind, Matt spurts out, a lambent glow to his face, "She only saw the ugliness of life, not the beauty." Weird. Maybe I only imagined that, too. For a moment Matt seemed stupidly good. On cue, a sudden swoop of desert breath blows puffy white plant seeds about us, glancing wind-dispersed helicopters of renewal, the air's soft-tickling genitals. The desert soil welcomes them.



Minneapolis: a riot over the police killing of a black man.

I can't get too annoyed with Matt. The blow was a glancing one. And I did enjoy the *unsameness* of it all. Abrupt occurrence and cessation wrecks the routine, breaks the boredom, high-speeds the heart, distracts the dogs. A tiny wrinkle in time. I limp home to put a cold compress on my knee. Slug down 2 Aleve capsules. The dogs lick my toes. Something inside me knows my knee is not badly damaged. It may develop more unusual tricks for an audience



Looking west of my home.

of Millennials to linger and laugh at as I saunter down grocery aisles. But I'm sure a modest insurance settlement check will be in the mail soon.

I sit nursing my sore knee, watching disturbing scenes on CNN as the country explodes in protest, years of frustration over pandemic police abuse released into the streets in swaffing waves of violence. Minneapolis, San Jose, Atlanta, Louisville, Des Moines, Denver, Houston, Los

Angeles, Dallas, Phoenix, Seattle, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. The city list growing longer as I watch. As if in angry sympathy, the sky darkens as flotillas of churning clouds surround my house and desert winds blow harder, more violent. Things are going beserk. Max Weber feared what would happen if citizens lost their faith in the established conventions of law. BTW, Weber died of pneumonia in the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic.

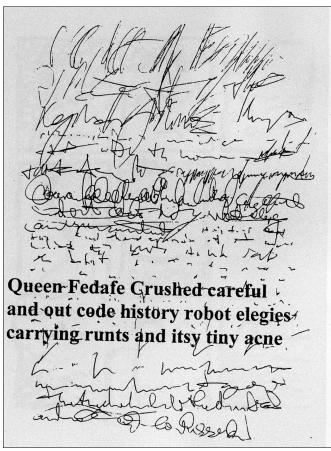
In need of calming, I forego my Keurig coffee machine and make a cup of Oolong tea the old-fashioned way. Steep, steep, a high-end Dancong Oolong unique to a region in the mountainous, humid, southeastern corner of Guangdong Province, China, it has complex floral and sweet woody notes, a smooth mouthfeel, and a persistent, enchanting aftertaste. A batch leftover from Noonie's stash of International teas with its memories of us sharing a pot and eagerly chatting about how serendipity has played out in our lives.

His Asian students were always giving him exotic teas brought from their various homelands. As 20-somethings, Noonie and his sister were into anything Asian. Leslie, a writer and poet, married a Vietnamese man, 1 of the many "boat people" to escape Saigon after it was invaded. At the time of her marriage, she wrote a series of poems and self-published them under the title *Adrift in the Cry Land: Poems About the Vietnamese in America* (1984):

I can eat no longer with an American fork. Go ahead, stab your meat, I will caress my food between 2 soft sticks of wood.

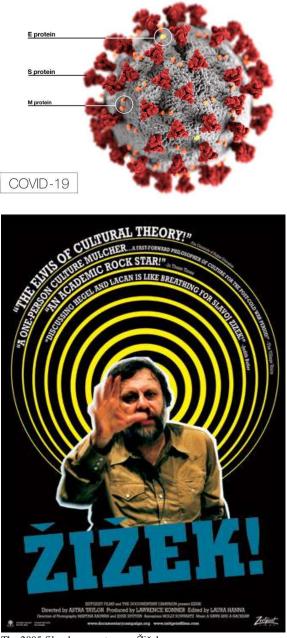
Noonie said that poem grasped a key difference between Western society and Eastern, and he related his discussion of it to Heidegger's critique of technological domination of the world. Noonie had been stationed in Thailand and studied Buddhism while there. Later, my son married a Thai woman and Noonie and I traveled to Bangkok for the wedding. He was astonished to see the "new" Bangkok, saddened, even. Noonie and Leslie adored haiku and calligraphy. Zen. All types of Asian cuisine. Yes, Asian students sensed Noonie's deep respect for them and their culture. Scores showed up at his wake.

Over cups of this superb Oolong, Noonie and I once discussed the asemic calligraphy of the famous Chinese artist "Crazy" Zh ng Xù, who'd imbibe copious amounts of rice wine to loosen his spirit, to induce exuberant, energetic, cursive calligraphy done in a singular mode which became known as "crazy grass style". Noonie's been known to smoke a "doobie" and do asemic scribbles, attempting his own version of that "crazy grass style". But none of Noonie's efforts exceeded his editor Eckhard's "crazy-as-a-fox" style:



Untitled, Eckhard Gerdes, in An Anthology of Asemic Writing,

When I finally head for bed the last item reported on the news is Police Precinct 5 in Minneapolis is burning.



The 2005 film documentary on Žižek.

The dates are by now well-rehearsed. 31 December: China informs the World Health Organization that cases of pneumonia with an unknown cause have been detected in Wuhan. 20 January: human-to-human transmission is confirmed. 24 January: scientists publish an article in the Lancet noting the coronavirus's "pandemic potential". 9 March: Italy imposes a national quarantine and enters lockdown. To this list of key moments, we can now add 24 March: theorist Slavoj Žižek's publisher announces that he has written a book about coronavirus, Pandemic! Add to this: 11 May: Picky Hunting receives a copy of that book via Amazon. 27 May: Picky reads Žižek's text and summarizes its main points: "A new form of what was once called communism," he writes, is needed to avoid this pandemic resolving into a global nightmare. When Žižek uses the term "communism" he is not talking about the "old-style" states of the 20th century, but the necessity for a "global organization that can control and regulate the economy as well as limit the sovereignty of nation states when needed," and a coordinated shift away from the market. He sees hints of this in the massive mobilization of state

resources to pay private sector wages, nationalize services, and direct industrial production. Several of my friends have posted similar observations on their Facebook pages.

I ordered the book because Noonie-the-cinéaste was critical of what he saw as "Žižek's utilitarian plundering in a machinic fashion Hollywood feature films" (especially Hitchcock's) merely to advance and illustrate aspects of his Marxist and Lacanian theoretical project. I'd never read the guy before. Wanted, as a psychoanalyst, to see what the hoopla was all about. Disappointed. Lacan isn't my cup of tea. Or coffee, either.

My thoughts having turned to Max Weber earlier — this year marks the centenary of his death — I now want to note a quote apropos to the rise of demagogues we suffer these days:

There is no more destructive corruption of political power than the parvenu, "[who goes] *"blustering around conceitedly rejoicing in feeling powerful.*



Trumphant Liar. "Plate sin with gold" (Shakespeare). When this image came on my large-screen TV, my dogs barked viciously at it.



Red - Green, Lewis Koch.

Prescient — this was 10 years prior to Hitler and Mussolini — he further claims that any attempt to resurrect the charismatic leaders of distant times past can only result in a spawn of demagogues, not genuine prophets. Yes.

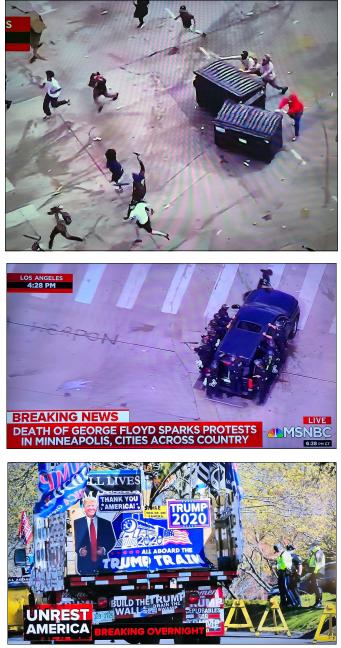
I am much taken by the colors red and red-orange in this image. It sets off an association. I peruse Noonie's photo files for this image taken by his friend, Lewis Koch on a trip he once took to Chimayó, about a 45-minute drive from here. El Santuario de Chimayó is a Roman Catholic church in there. (*Santuario* is Spanish for "sanctuary".) This shrine, a National Historic Landmark, is famous for the story of its founding and as a contemporary pilgrimage site.

In Koch's photograph, the contradiction between the word GREEN and the bunch of red Chimayó peppers, is an Orwellian moment when someone asks:

"What color is this?"

"Red."

"If Trump says it's green. What color is it?" "Green."



Pro-Trump truck, Washington, D.C.

Chicago, Milwaukee, Portland, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Atlanta, Bakersfield, Sacramento, San Diego, Boston, Columbus, Memphis — the protests continue to spread as people continue to see RED over police abuse and "look-the-other-way" officials. City mayors try to separate for us the RED (violent) thugs from the GREEN (non-violent) protesters. Physicists tell us the color RED is associated with 400 billion electromagnetic frequencies per second. GREEN with 600 billion.

Upheaval — while the Immanent Baboon sputters racist language from his cage surrounded by persistent protesters, whose voices are countered by a circulating pro-Trump truck loaded with an array of political clichés.

And still no arrests of the 3 other officers involved in the horrific incident.

I am an unreliable narrator. I was wrong that Precinct 5 in Minneapolis was torched. It wasn't. Torched.

Imagine what Obama,

if he was still President, would say. Would try to do to heal us. Would not set a torch to wood, would he? Not use incendiary language.

It is difficult to think romance — like JDate, OurTimes, or Silver Singles dating sites — and hope for a brighter future right now. I am just ANGRY. My raw stress-induced chest rash is back. I thought it remained in Oak Park when I left. The strong New Mexican sun only aggravates it. I can only walk the dogs at sunset now or when storm clouds gather, which they are doing again now.



COVID cure old-style?



Cure for a socially-distanced June graduate.

If I had to think of a musical accompaniment to both the political climate and the weather here today, I would choose Jeanne Lee singing to Mal Waldron's stunning jazz piece "The Seagulls of Khristiansund". To Waldron's dark, rippling chords, Lee cries, wails, and ululates. I often go to YouTube to listen to it. I had it played at Noonie's wake: "They know from the past a life cannot last . . ."

In the present circumstances, we seem driven back to our primitive impulses, even as cuttingedge social media circulates outrage. We are living through an unprecedented experiment not of our choosing. Death is, in the words of a Polish poet, Czesław Miłosz, "a mole burrowing through *our* subconsciousness." But now our cemeteries are empty above ground, below full to busting. Think Brazil. *Não há mais espaço*, written in

angry black Sharpie on a piece of cardboard and taped to the entrance gate.

In Mexico, where every day is a Day of the Dead, someone was reported to have auctioned off his dead aunt's old tin coffee can full of pesos. Any person today putting a shoulder against a life in danger, no matter how completely failing to do the smallest good, is a hero.

One of Noonie's old friends just e-mailed me yesterday this thought-provoking insight: "Once, we were invincible, once wallowing in our unlimited life-force we were continually one step ahead of ourselves. Today?"

Can we take this as an advantage, an opportunity, to make changes as Žižek suggests? Or will it be again biz-as-usual — *entrepreneurialism*? Strange. Why is that term imported from France? Can't we Yankees come up with our own English word to describe the good ol' American business "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead, cost-benefit, go-forit spirit? Hey, French fries became Freedom fries after France's opposition to the invasion of Iraq. But French kissing never became Freedom Kissing.

Dispel negativity through creative activities.

Which reminds me, sadly, I haven't been French kissed (or Freedom kissed) for way too long. Desire. Art sublimates desire, Freud said. It's only going so far in my case. Idle hands are the devil's

tools, so I keep typing and making line sketches of the dogs. Today's Lu Lu's fortune cookie advice re-enforces these truisms. In the future, I'd like to use 1000s of fortune cookie advice slips as a means to assembly them and write a complete novel with those fragments of wisdom. But I'm sure someone has already done that. I wonder if fortune cookie advice will



Dog Nap (2020) Picky Hunting.

change due to the pandemic? Maybe a running underlying theme to batches of fortune slips devoted to: LOVE IN THE TIME OF COVID or UNTRAP YOUR SELF LIKE A DUCK or DIFFICULTY CATCHING THE AMBIGUITY or ADVICE TO SINGERS IN DIFFERENT PROVINCES or RUNNING INTO SOMEONE AGAIN AGAIN or SIGNED THE MANAGEMENT or PROMISES TO MAKE NOW or DRIVING BACKWARD WITH A TRAILER or CURES FOR DUNDERHEADS. The words: *Covid-19, mask,* and *ventilator* in Chinese characters (sort of asemic!) on the flip side.



Morning. The sky is starting to pink, tendrils of color leap up and across the horizon. Land is stark and lush at the same time. Empty and full of life. I feel far away from last night's news reports. Cities with riots: 140; states calling out their National Guard units: 20. People with the jitters: 10⁵. Legit protesters being edged out by vandals.

Who would have thought something else would come along that could nearly erase The Reign of COVID XIX right off American TV screens? What's next? Trump declaring martial law across the country followed by the shooting of demonstrators? Or maybe a good ol' fascist coup? What's next, the renaming of the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania as Bois de Boogaloo?

Things couldn't get worse? Yes, our H.O.A. president has just posted on our Aldea community blog that we have become victims of looting, too:

Dear Aldeans:



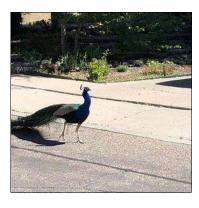
Area showing stolen moss rocks.

It seems we had approximately 85 red stackable wall moss rock stolen from the Avenida Frijoles entry over the weekend. If anyone saw something please let me know. From what I can see, a truck was driving on the side of road while 2 individuals (based on shoe marks) grabbed rocks from the edge of path and loaded them into a truck. I have called the sheriff.



Moss Rocks ready to be placed.



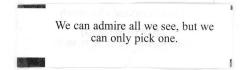




Wow, what a wonderful way to wake up. Instead of sugar plums dancing in my head, it's stolen plump moss rocks. These rocks are found throughout our community and are very decorative. The dogs and I enjoy them on our walks (the dogs for other reasons!). I have some in my yard (like the ones seen in the photograph here).

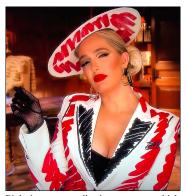
This morning my choice of K-cup brew is Death Wish coffee, the strongest brew made for the Keurig coffee-maker, needed to wash down my scrambled eggs liberally seasoned with Chimayó red chiles. Dessert, a fortune cookie. A real KAPOW! breakfast, huh?

Snapping on the TV, the 1st image to pop up is an ad for OurTime online dating. Cracking opening my fortune cookie, I read:



Then our Aldea NextDoor site posts this photo of a peacock (a sign of sexual display) strolling down my street. Now that is what Noonie would call a "comic roll of the dice," for sure. I take the hint. I need to, despite the lockdown, make some overtures to meet a man. If I do post on OurTime, I'll use this woman as an avatar (see photo next page) to troll for my match. I did kind of look like that once, and certainly the fashion extravagance is all me. Every fashion has a theory.

Luckily, I just ordered *Elizabeth Takes Off*, Taylor's weight-management/cookbook/self-help book. Must lose some weight before I actually meet some guy face-to-face, even if it is at a distance of 6 feet or more. Scary. In the face of the other person we meet the inaccessible fact of their being. Noonie found face-to-face contact disturbing; even wondered "who the fuck" that guy was in the mirror. Found it easier to put a camera between himself and the other person. But that can get painful, too. Witness the Australian camera-team in



Picky's avatar; talk about a peacockish display!

Lafayette Park who got bashed with shields and batons by military cops in D.C. when Trump took his saunter to St. John's Church for his big photo op. The scene didn't play well to angry Aussies. Put 1 shrimp (Trump) on the barbie!

Shrimp. That 1 size, in a man, I am not interested in. I *can* be picky. I am Picky.

Well, if am going to get going — to get a man — I need to do some Retail Therapy. Sadly, it must be limited to online purchases. Jeeze, how many blouses and shoes I've had to return when I've dared fashion to order by such means, practically sight unseen. Luckily, my contact with

someone will be either by postings, or messages, or waist-up FaceTime, until it's safer to meet outside. Apropos, my desire to find another man, Vitalina sent me a note of hope in 1 of her online missives: "Remember, Picky, a widow's spirit can be destroyed by the wind and radiation fluxes of memory. Then remember that 1 of the most powerful adaptive powers of our species is its ability to transmute a stray encounter into a first chapter." To prove her point she sent a link to this online personals posting from the San Francisco Bay area (where she once lived):

The Stranger Lovelab 23 / Man / Golden Gate Park

Faeire Queen, saw you in Golden Gate Park by the tennis court wearing a dress of hummingbird feathers and a crown of tiny stars. Near your lips, a beauty spot galante. I asked for a light. Your skin was the color of a summer moon, your eyes as deep as madness. Should I have asked for more — a coffee? Prove to me everything does not taste like beige. I await with a corsage for a coarse age — for you. P.S., I love Bruce Springsteen music. Reply: Apul at 415-333-5555.



I typed her back: *Message received. Or as you'd put it 'I grok'*. A phrase she's copped from a Robert Heinlein sci-fi novel and tosses about without realizing he was a bit of a fascist. I'm not going to tell her, it'd stir up a hornet's nest. But it does look like I have stirred up a bunch of large flies when I forgot to close the double doors to the veranda when picking up dog poop (it's the

Second Law of Thermodynamics that the order life creates, my mutts, only results in more disorder elsewhere, their droppings). Now my home office is abuzz and not with just my online activity and future hopes. I vow *no more self-pity, no matter what happens*.

I want to try something really daring, truly *avant* (as Noonie might say), beyond the pales of known thrash, just a snuggle up, tenderly, a just barely grazing of lips, for about 20 minutes. With someone. Like I did with Noonie, writhing in a slow sliding tangle of YES (and NO if he got too overt). He and I were so attuned to each other's thought patterns, we could finish each other's sentences; read each other's mail without opening it. Riding in the car on long trips, to pass time, we'd perform witty hectic verbal ping-pong. One of us would name a topic and Hi Ho Silver Away! A good way to see suitability of a future partner:

Shoes.

We may not have souls but shoes . . . certainly!

But shoes don't last.

That's just the tip of the iceberg. They have insoles, too.

Now watch your tongue.

Are you saying I'm a heel?

Watch your tongue or I will give you a welt.

That's being a bit straightlaced, ain't it?

Why did Charlie Chaplin's character in the silent film The Gold Rush eat his shoes?

He thought it was Thai food!

But shoes offer something even more healthful, an ankle wrap.

Good. Now that's toeing the mark! You deserve a medallion.

Your toes are daily inside the dark space of your shoe, so why don't they suffer tarsal tunnel syndrome more often?

Socks. They keep the adversary intimidated by force.

That's being a bit arch, ain't it?

No, that's the flex-point of my argument.

Are you trying to vamp me?

Merely burnishing.

I'll have you by the throat if you keep attacking me!

Well, gotta skip out, need to clean my moustache.

I know you; you're just going to the local tap with "Leather Boy" to have a boot of German beer at that bar, Velcro Stays, that plays non-stop Beatles songs from Rubber Soul.

* * *

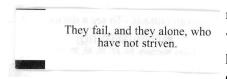
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A MIRROR IS LIKE A SOFT PILLOW. I wrote this in a creative writing class, "Literary Yoga," in response to an assignment by a teacher named Yuriy; he tasked us to: "Create an unusual simile." If you asked a student to do that today, they'd post a silly smiley emoji.



Yes, glee. Back then, in my youth, a mirror was that, for me. Now? *A MIRROR IS LIKE A BROWNSTUDY*, melancholic reflections in the soul's own studio? A door onto death. Think Cocteau's *Orphée*. A snippet of a song from Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Cats* come to mind: *All alone in the moonlight / I can smile at the old days / I was beautiful then*... Or, as Maurice Blanchot has it: "Nobody likes to recognize himself as a stranger in a mirror where he doesn't see his double but instead someone he would have liked to be."

Ah, Yuriy. A kindly man, a bilingual Ukrainian/English author. An engineer and linguist by training, he worked as computer scientist at IBM Corporation, then as a professor of Ukrainian literature and culture. But when he told our class to "Synopsize *War and Peace* chapter-by-chapter using only 1 sentence per chapter — due in 3 weeks — half the class either dropped out or rushed to the student bookstore to buy the appropriate *CliffsNotes*.



There was a fist fight in the aisle over the last copy, if my memory serves me correctly. I tried to do it the hard way the prof intended, but came down with severe pneumonia and had to drop that class, too. But you can't say I didn't *strive hard* while healthy. BTW, that

bummer bout with bad pneumonia is why I am now so terrified of a tussle with COVID XIX, his knee on my neck. That feeling of not being able to breathe. Like being buried alive.



Inside Meow Wolf: Avoid the Void (2017) photo by Noonie.

I know personally how totally terrifying George Floyd's slow march to death was.

Noonie was sensitive, too, to this, our, rush toward the void. He took this odd photograph inside Meow Wolf (left) during an earlier trip here for the Creativity and Madness Conference. And he often wrote in his Moleskine notebook about his existential moods from his late-inlife perspective. He compared that notebook of his to a ship's logbook:

It captures the peculiar quality of stasis in motion, recording each day in a sequence of digits, dates, degrees, bearing, depths, which for me evokes a particular relationship to time — sailor's time — where, instead of the present, the past and the future become extraordinarily rich in narrative potential.

As his devoted wife, his changing concerns about time and death began to disturb me. Here's another excerpt from his notebook:

Although only one of the numberless people who have lived, here I'm the leading man, albeit a wilting flower of humanity; yet I am still open in the present, in the movie theater of the world, but knowing time is running out on my reel. So I often dash into that dark space of my memories, enveloping myself in a cone of silence to watch myself in re-screenings of my past. In order to understand my now I jump into my past, seeking the traces of all the events that played a part in producing who I am today. The potential and unrealized side of the instant I am now living demands saturation, retrospectively in past acts and prefiguratively in future acts. The historicity of my experience can be now experienced historically. As Proust knew, time as a body enters our narratives. If only a piece of silk separates life from death, death may not be an exit into nothingness, but a falling into possibility and potential.



Lewis snaps out at a suspect after he hears of Morse's death.

The last sentence can be read as lifeaffirming, *or* a tug toward justifying suicide. The worrying ambiguity expressed here matches the coroner's indecisive verdict concerning Noonie's demise.

Uncannily, this death theme was picked up in the last "Inspector Morse" TV episode I watched during my taco salad lunch. I cried when, after many, many adventures with Morse and his sidekick, Lewis, he passes of a heart attack. Lewis

stands before Morse's corpse, bends down and kiss his often difficult superior on the forehead. Certainly, my Noonie would've appreciated the language play on Remorseful and Re: Morse Full in Season 8, episode 5's title.

Yes, as you've witnessed so far, coincidences of this sort haunt my life, fill Noonie's books. *Factoid: Henry Crabb Robinson, English lawyer and diarist (d. 1867) once saw Coleridge kiss a book by Spinoza. I once saw Noonie kiss a book by David Markson.* We are all just floating around accidental-like on a desert wind, events bumping into other events. As Noonie put it: "The universe is messy: nonlinear, turbulent, and chaotic. It spends its time in transient behavior on its way to somewhere else. It self-organizes and evolves."



Really? Has it come down to having to warn people about this?

Yet today, events and behaviors are becoming more sharply defined. Witness the noon news. The pandemic has mutated from a test of immune health and emotional endurance into a national intelligence test. Who remains cautious and stays at home. Who protests or parties without masks. Who drenches their vegetables with bleach. Who doesn't. Who drinks bleach. Who

doesn't. Who thinks the pandemic is a total scam. Who doesn't. And now into a moral test. Who thinks kneeling on someone's neck for minutes on end is justified. Who doesn't. Who thinks pushing an old man to the concrete is justified. Who doesn't. Who thinks bashing news cameramen is justified. Who doesn't. Not in my lifetime has there been raised such explicit choices that define who we are. All the above will become encompassed in the Big National Decision concerning: Who votes Trump. Who doesn't.

All this in a world era 1 wit called "Culminant Man," i.e., people devoid of historical awareness, dependent on opinions (which they think are theirs) borrowed from the circulating small set of slogans attached to the carefully vetted issues of the moment, living vicariously via electronic media in a world committing ethicide (AT&T's logo is a Death Star!), resulting in blunted senses, a hollowed out language, an erasure of certain emotions and connection to the past, to the land and the soil. Ugh!

I check our NextDoor Aldea online community postings regularly for comments on these pressing issues. But today's post is a welcome respite:

WANTED: HUMAN PLAYMATE FOR MISCHIEVOUS LITTLE MULE:

Melly is a savvy 2-year old miniature mule who loves to interact with humans. She is smart as a tack, affectionate, well-behaved, and a very quick learner who benefits from lots of stimulation and attention. . . .



Hey, count me in! Melly is my affectionate tag for Melanie, my best bud. But reading further in the post, they want an 8-year+ child to interact with the mule and prepare her for an equine program. Responses to the post were many and of the type:

Oh, we all really needed this to brighten up our lives, especially now!! I'll text you soon. Thank you, thank you!

She is so adorable! I'm disabled, maybe my caregiver will take me to see her. That would be so much fun and better than staying indoors all the time.

Ah, to catch the vigorous horse of one's mind.

My two big mules, Sadie & Sallie, say hello to little Melly from across the way!

I am in love! [My response.]

I start clearing out old e-mails. I find in my Spam folder a peculiar message "Zen(t)" from Japanese taiko drumming, folk music artist, and singer/songwriter Ken Koshio:

KEN KOSHIO NEWS: Taiko 'n Roll Live Show II, Ying and Yang

Every sunset gives us one day less to live, but every sunrise gives us one day more to hope. May every sunrise bring you hope and every sunset bring you peace.

May light and hope always surround you. May your wounds heal and your heart embrace love, kindness, and wisdom. May you fulfill all your dreams and desires.

When someone tosses you a tea bowl, catch it! Catch it nimbly with soft cotton, with the soft cotton of your skillful mind.

UNBLOCK THAT SENDER commands my mind. Need more of Ken's emotional boosters — superior knowledge seasoned with common sense — more so than ever before. More.



It is raining hard. The wind blows frighteningly. It literally hoots at me. The sky is blackboard black. A perfect time to snuggle up with the dogs and watch a Hallmark Channel Aurora Teagarden Mystery from 2015 that I recorded from late last night. I couldn't resist the title. Could you? I'm sure some of you readers, having come this

far into my narrative, have a bone to pick with me. Yes?

* *



Cesare Pavese.

Italian author, Cesare Pavese, always touches me with his words. Those appropriate to my existential situation these days are: We do not remember days, we remember moments. . . . The only joy in the world is to begin. . . . Life is pain and the enjoyment of love is an anesthetic.

To begin. Love. But so hard now with the ongoing pandemic, the persistent protests. The world conspires to keep me at home, to keep me lonely. I finally decide to log on to OurTime.com

for 50+ singles and sign-up. I peruse photos and profiles. Browse, window shop. I create a profile *sans* my photo:

VERY PICKY.



Imagine yourself in a new southwest Ph.D. P.H. story by D. H. Lawrence. Time to get a buzz on with a 75-year-old Santa Fean honey who is energetic, quick-witted, creative, a gardener and gourmand (I've dined at Noma in Denmark). I am a queen bee seeking a generous, spirited, cineaste 70s-something, well-educated male "mensch". Must be comfortable with dogs, adore wine and dirty martinis, yet enjoy "comfort food," such as my family-famous BTYMM (Better-Than-Your-

Momma's-Meatloaf) and Tomasita's Santa Fe-famous sopapillas. Religious nuts, Republicans, and alpha-males need not apply. Only Kosher offers accepted.

A sampling of profiles perused:



Crispin: Gentleman scholar, an error theorist, seeks compatible female to help figure out what's important. We think in generalities, but live in details. Fun factivist wants to play Trivial Pursuit with you and only you every night. I'm a War on Drugs kind of guy, but adore sweet liqueurs of all types. Unattractive, boring hens, need not apply. Q.E.D.



David: An artist and a man with a cause. Present crisis has exposed crimes and injustices. Let's share Tai Chi, theatre, Buddhist meditation, concerts, art openings, Scrabble. No mindbody split here!



Floyd: Get your bearings while traveling with this sophisticated restauranteur / sommelier and seasoned traveler. Lover of the arts, classical music. *Je parle un peu français*. So let's travel, taste *vin* in the Burgundy region, and dine at La Marin in Noirmoutier-en-l'Île, (not necessarily in the that order). My friends call me "The Bear." Will you be my "bear hug"? If so, I will bare my soul to you, like "T m fussy at the nipple."

Mixed results. Dan, the artist seems a possibility. I realize it's going to be tough job hooking up with someone compatible. I recall with horror my dating experiences prior to Noonie. Guys who *at our 1st dinner date* asked if I enjoyed giving blow jobs. An ex-Alderman who bragged about his vast collection of Nazi memorabilia. A lawyer who for a long time didn't divorce his crazy alcoholic wife because she loved S&M. Another sadsack who recently lost his wife to cancer and only talked about her, nothing else. A



Dreidels.

therapist who admitted to beating his (now) ex-wife, but said, "I could never do that to a Jewish woman." An overly talkative rabbi (even for a rabbi) who lost this wife in a synagogue shooting back east and dealt with the trauma by authoring *From Dreidel to Grave: Abetting Jewish Gelt*. Written in Yiddish. He talked incessantly about his prostate issues. A cardiologist who admitted to being a 60-year old virgin, but stressed he had a "big heart." A diabetic accountant who kept pouring sugar in his coffee. A wealthy investor who couldn't keep his hands off the waitress serving us. I could go on to fill a Moleskine notebook

with all these misadventures, but I want to segue and expand upon my Better-Than-Your-Mama's-Meatloaf. Having mentioned it in my OurTime posting, I have the strongest desire to make it for dinner tonight. I can eat off it for several days.



"The damnedest-best loaf in this dimension," Noonie praised, extolling the loaf's fine qualities, its admirable texture, the feeling tone one gets upon swallowing. "It parses its every variation using flat a's, throatily hooted o's, and incorrect past participles," he explained.

I especially love how it pairs with The Stump Jump Grenache-Shiraz-Mourvédre (with its taste of ripe plums and red berries followed by licorice, flowers, and tarmac aromas). You can substitute Proust's fav, Vouvray, or enjoy a full-bodied He'Brew beer; hell, even delicious with 2% milk. The sides that go best with it are mashed 'taters and Corn Mother (for Hopi, an ear of perfect corn whose tip ends in 4 full kernels). Fat-free butter ain't in my vocabulary, but I offer mashed cauliflower or sweet potato fries for dieters). May I proudly detail its ingredients? The chef (me) uses oatmeal rather than bread crumbs, chicken, not red meat. Local carrots, onions, celery, bell peppers, chopped. A karate chop and a ridge down the center like a sunken backbone holds ketchup, brown sugar, and mustard topping sauce. A tad too sweet for some, but they're probably sourpusses in need of a sweetenin' up.

k :

The great mystery. How a creature (Trump, a cop) can contain the deadliest poison and not, itself, be poisoned. Without an image, no one believes there is pain:

Scene: a Black Lives Matter Protest.

Demonstrators facing a line of helmeted cops.





A cop enjoying his work.



Demonstrator: Are you all just one big threshing machine? Or can you be free, feeling human beings?

Cops in unison: We take to our knee for you.

D: You pretend. You don't really hear the music. You give all your emotions ready-made. You think our hearts are a big joke. You need to be re-made. Defunded.

C: We have dark night-sticks.

D: You have a false way of holding that instrument: grandiosity, affectation, the unnecessary muscle tension. You cannot behave inwardly, thus. Already, you are lost. Are you even listening when you play on that instrument of yours?

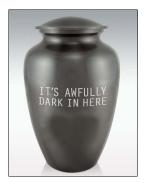
C: Strategy, technique.

D: But no vision. Your bodies tell lies all by themselves. Turn your heels out more! Relax your necks.

C: You all have no basis for standing like that, facing us.

D: You *know* what's on our minds! Black air over America.

* *



It's getting dark. Sunset a black bruise to the west toward the Jemez mountains. The mood of the moment, melancholy. I look over to the top of my dresser where Noonie's ashes reside in a dark urn he himself picked out. Always a laugh to the last, that guy. Makes me want to laugh and cry at the same time. As if in contrast to dark skies and thoughts, KOAT News illuminates viewers on the State's various brush fires fueled by drought, low humidity, and fierce winds. I find the names chosen for these conflagrations almost "cute": Turkey Fire, Good Fire, Tadpole

Fire, Farm Camp Fire. Only in New Mexico, where even bad events can be made to partake of the spell of enchantment. Noonie would've appreciated this.



Some of the restaurants are re-opening for limited seating. Good. I am getting tired of ordering pick-up. The Tea House on famed Canyon Road is a place I've yet to go. Their breakfasts are given high ratings. Eggs benedict variations their specialty. Miss chatting (a good name for an aristocratic girl in a British novel, huh?) with the wait staff, overhearing conversations at adjoining tables. While looking online for a good green chile burger place with outside seating, I notice a Lota Burger franchise (there are many here) is featuring "The TrumpBurger: red-blooded American beef on a hero roll with a little bologna."

My iPhone rings. Yep, it's Buddy Checking time again. My next door neighbor, Ichika (it means "1000 flowers"), calls every other day around sunset to see if I am "Okay." She's a grade school teacher, now teaching from home. Married to a Los Alamos scientist; they have 2 boys. Since the lockdown, I only see her sneaking out to brave the wind in some kind of kimono and fuzzy slippers, retrieving her newspaper. Today, after asking after me,

she drops a few lines of advice: "Picky, you may want to follow this up. I saw a 'possible' for you on JDate. His profile read: 'I am a bipolar orthopedic podiatrist from Chama, NM. I'm a Rio Chama — that's New Mexican for Real Charmer even as it refers to my northern New Mexico Rio Grande river locale — who loves fuzzy navel cocktails in hot tubs, and adores fadeless beauty.' And that's verbatim, my dear."

Other times, she charms me with stories about Japan and her family there: "My relatives descend from the *tsuchigumo*, the sturdy and notorious 'earth-spiders.' My mother's name translates as 'seaweed ocean breath' and she's sixty-five years young today." Peppers her conversation with tidbits about Japanese culture: "*The flower in the mirror and the moon on water* — it's Japanese saying meaning 'that which can be seen but not grasped,' like my Asian face is an enigma to many Westerners."

She wants a socially-distanced meeting at her front gate. When I arrive, she is standing, bearing her weight to the left, forcing that hip to jut out a bit; her left arm is bent outwards at the elbow, while her corresponding hand rests on her hip, holding a manila envelope. Behind me, the fire-glow from the east grows more forceful by the second, turning Deepest Vermilion #3 (my nail-color) as it spreads among the gray clouds.



Ichika's youngest boy's drawing. He has a penchant for math.

Here is a sampling of the best:

"Honey, here is some choice stuff. Grrrrrist!"

I gingerly grab the file and glance inside: a scanned copy of her youngest son's artistic effort (petroglyph-ish!) and a treasure trove of weird postings she's stumbled on at a variety of peculiar online sites.

"Those might be interesting to you, as a writer, you know." Well, best not prolong our contact."

"Thanks, er, Arigatou." I bow.

"Arigatou." She bows.

I can't wait to read the litany of listings. Later that night I sit down in my lovely living room and go through the items.

Facebook: "Maddy and Jørgen, frolicking like horny sea ponies in the water. Sorry the photo is blurred."

Craigslist (West Seattle, WA): "I have found a time machine. Will sell to the highest future bidder."

Aldea NextDoor: "I've found a bargain on 'painted on skin' tights on e-Bay."

- OurTime (San Pedro, CA): "The Belladonna Lady of the Rocks seeks to heal a blurrybored man of the docks. Let waterswell, riveripple. I offer fractureless compassion as we sail into the entropics."
- Yoga Journal: "To zero in on a circle, spiral in. The gentler the spiral, the gentler the conversation with the circle. Let the circle become part of your spiral. Then you may claim the spiral supreme.
- How to Read Blog: "Re-read your books often. Read them backwards, go hunting in them. Circular. Notice something new each time the text comes back around. Savor it. Thumb the pages."
- Bray Blog (Antifa): "We must have the strength to stand in opposition to current society, get the gumption of Ionesco's Bérenger and stand against the rhinoceroses. Although an endangered species in nature, in society it is proliferating, being able to feed on hate.
- The Optimistic Science of Pessimism: "Each day a carbon copy of the last. Like pinballs in constant replay we ping and pong. You need a bookmark to tell one day from the other."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Then & Now: "The whole of life lies in the verb seeing."

The Total Ruskin Site: "Today - a word carved on a stone on John Ruskin's desk."

PunPlayhouse: Some puns span more than one language, to wit: the characterization of an elegant frankfurter as a "haute dog," a form of wordplay known as macaronic (from the Latin *macaronicus*, meaning "jumble" or "medley"). This pun must be *herd* (i.e., served with mustard to folks).

Noonie would've appreciated these, seen them akin to messages-in-a-bottle tossed to the ocean waves, to wash up on his beach. Grist for his schizo-writing. He wanted to outdo the literary thievery of Hans Magnus Enzensberger, to base his writing aesthetic on Roland Barthes' notion of a text as "a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash." Believing the text a tissue of quotations, he wanted to emulate that in doing what he called "playin' jarism," being "a deadly submarine in the sea of authorships, exploding their narratives and collecting the shards." He sought the psyche of sensitive readers free from the conventions of understanding.

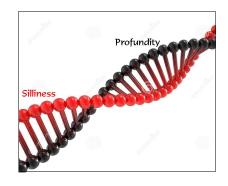
My postmodern hubby had been particularly dismayed with the preponderance of narrative realism planted and nurtured in today's MFA Writing Programs, then harvested by the literary press. He had a strong rebellious streak he dubbed "Raising the Black Flag of Anarchism." For example, in response to a very picky editor's demands that he "cut the fuckin' fat from that monstrous text," he'd taken page 7 of that 400 page tome, blacked out every O B C T (i.e., obesity!) and sent it back with a note, "How's this, kind sir?" signing it "Slender Man." You can imagine the guy's response. Here's that very page. He'd pasted it into a Moleskine notebook of his:

The Thing As Shapes & Some

7

greater meta optiminan area. She spench ao long night huddled in her studie, assuring Di that everything would be all right as the sounds of fear and descrution racked her windows. She loss herself in bleak thoughts of the price that would needed be paid for all this, the price that would not doubt be levied against innocents like Di, who could not wage war against anyloody. Spheres, she thought savagely, were crutilemakers by design. They could spin; therefore they were revolutionary. It was not just their privilege but their nature to take the path of least resistance, no matter what lay ahead of mem. It was just the way they rolled. Just uses, like Di? They were solid, dependable, and unemplaining. They received love and asked for nothing more. How cerrible it was that they would now be lumped in the same pagery as such delinquents.

Sufin the morning, the sounds of desrugion gave way to an eerie silen eenha persisted until the sun reached its heighein the sky. Meniga ventured downsmirs alone and disevered what these who had already left heir homes already knew: that whatever had driven the spheres their destructive madness the night fore seemed 🏟 have exhausted, n 🏟 just their rage, out their will 🌑 live. Wherever she looked, in every direction, the spheres remained in the places they had the me me resp, moving only when some of the people they had terrorized kicked them against walls or beatthem with golf lluss and pats. Some, damaged by heir fury of the night efore, had lost so much of their Sounde chatchey responded as any fall from a height not with an exuderant spring out rather with a sullen and indifferent hud. As she walked the city, she saw workers flearing their unresisting forms from the streets and loading them in prucks; and she knew that all over the world, all these ne laimed by loyal parents would be taken somewhere far from sightwhere they suld be stacked in pyramids or plawed in anyons wr menerwise forgetten about For the first time in a life spent aking is as maker of faich that her sube had a soul, she found herself doutting that all shape-thildren did, and wondering if they would even fare a But being distarded in this manner. But what was the alternative? Where ing what they'd done? Leaving them where they'd landed and trusting that they'd never run roughshod øver the landstape again? It was not that she had no answer. It was that every answer she had made her feel dirty. If was a warm day put she hugged herself, shivering from a cold that priginated samewhere deep in her marraw.



Yes. Noonie's DNA had an equal measure of profundity and silliness.

*

* *



Restroom Wall Mural with Graffiti, Tesusque Village Market, Tesuque, NM (2019) Picky Hunting.



I'm Picky: Restroom Wall Mural with Graffiti, Tesusque Village Market, Tesuque, NM (2019) Picky Hunting.

11.0



Camel Rock, near Tesuque, NM. (2020) Picky Hunting.



Reuben pastrami sandwich, Tesuque Village Market (2020) Picky Hunting.



Bar Offerings, Tesuque Village Market (2020) Picky Hunting.

Some restaurants I've dined at serve up so many introductory courses and side dishes that my appetite is nil by the time the entrée arrives. Why I prefer *tapas*, it's all side dishes, no main course. On the other hand, when I want just a main course that stuffs you and gratifies you completely, I head for the best Jewish deli in the area. When I lived in Chicago, the go-to place was Max's Deli in Highland Park. The dish was a pastrami Reuben on rye.

When I called Abe and Flo and inquired where to get good deli here, they raved about the Reuben and the Green Chile Burger served at the Tesuque Village Market. "It's a market, bar, and restaurant, Picky." Urged me to go because my 15-minute trip north toward the Tesuque pueblo and the restaurant would take me near famous Camel Rock which they praised as "a great photo op" for me. I remember it from a trip to Bandelier National Monument when Noonie and I were here 2 years ago. Flo claimed that "On any day you might find Ali MacGraw, Cormac McCarthy, Val Kilmer, Ted Danson, Robert Redford, Oprah Winfrey, or Gene Hackman downing a beer and a burger at the Village Market." I think — Robert Redford! — my heart beating harder. Then I recall he's married.

Tesuque is a locale of contrasts. Many famous, wealthy people have lavish residences there, but it is also a sacred home to Pueblo Indians. I go online for more information about the area. The name Tesuque is a Spanish variation of the Tewa name, *Te Tesugeh Oweengeh*, meaning the "village of the narrow place of the cottonwood trees."

That pueblo is among the state's smallest, with a population of only 500. Located in the soft red-brown foothills of the Sangre de

Cristo Mountains, 10 miles north of Santa Fe off U.S. 84-285, Tesuque Pueblo has an air of centuries-old tranquility. *I could use such tranquility right now*. Situated around a large central plaza, the pueblo has stood on this site since 1200 A.D. and it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. *My kind of place*. The entrance to the pueblo lies just south of great photo op, Camel Rock (a rock can look like almost anything). The expressway, U.S. 84-285, acts as a man-made barrier between the impoverished pueblo on 1 side and the ranchos of the wealthy on the other. I was reading Frank Waters' *Book of the Hopi* and was just about to visit Tesuque Pueblo when the lockdown occurred. No access is permitted to the pueblo during the Reign of COVID XIX. Native populations here and in Arizona have taken a brutal blow from the virus. I see a derelict wall with graffito; NO TO THE MASSACRE OF OUR PEOPLE. My anger at this injustice sometimes boils over. Ihope that the Navajo Nation's wishes that military bases be renamed with Native American war heroes be realized.



French Protest Poster (1968).

Meanwhile, TV shows protesters continuing to (amazingly!) create temporary autonomous zones in cities. Noonie was fascinated by such anarchic visions of "pirate utopias" as defined by anarchist writer Peter Lamborn Wilson (a.k.a., Hakim Bey) who coined the term in his 1995 book *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs & European Renegadoes.* Secret islands, they were used for supply purposes by pirates. For Bey, these pirate enclaves were early forms of autonomous proto-anarchist societies in that they operated beyond the reach of governments and embraced unrestricted freedom.



Film still from Noonie's videotape Loth to Obey (1995).

In 2003, Bey's TAZ - The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism further developed his concept of temporary autonomous zones (TAZ), spaces that elude formal structures of control. Bey uses various examples from history and philosophy, all of which suggest that the best way to create a non-hierarchical system of social relationships is to concentrate on the present and on releasing one's own mind from the controlling

mechanisms that have been imposed on it. Noonie had Bey's book in the SOCIOLOGY section of his extensive library. It was well-thumbed, red-underlined, glossed.

In Hopi creation myth, there is a sociology relevant to today. The First People were of different colors and spoke different languages, but understood each other without talking. They were in harmony with themselves and nature. All lives mattered, all matter was alive. Then there came among them *Lavaíhoya*, the Talker, who took the form of a mocking bird called *Mochni* (Hitler!) who talked incessantly and convinced his listeners of the difference between them in terms of color, religion, and speech; between people and nature. Then came *Káto'ya*, a snake with a big head (Trump!) who lead the People further away from one another and nature, encouraged conflict among them, made them suspicious of each other, until they became fierce and began to fight among themselves — they were now of Two Hearts.



Ricardo Cate has been drawing the daily cartoon "Without Reservations" for the Santa Fe New Mexican since 2006. His wry and often poignant humor pokes fun at both the white man and the Indian. Ricardo follows the ways of his Kewa Pueblo heritage and teaches on the reservation.

Surely, the Hopi today can understand what is happening in America now under Two Hearts. And grieve for our fate in this Fourth World, where life is out of balance (*Koyaanisqatsi*) due to materialism, imperialism, and gross appetites. Yes, yes, I saw that movie of the same name.

Hopi belief poses to answer the always difficult question: *Who are we? Why are we here?* Their answer to that isn't far from what other belief systems have proposed. Who am I? Why am I here, here in Santa Fe, now? I have a deep admiration for both Navajo and Hopi cultures. Before

the lockdown, I would stroll Santa Fe Plaza along the long, covered portico lined with seated Native American artists offering their wares. I couldn't help feel guilt for the way they were treated. At 1st, it was difficult for me to make direct eye contact, imagining what they might be thinking of *me*. As a Jew, I could identify with them as an oppressed people and, in their myth, as a Chosen People. Could they sense that? How might I express my empathy without seeming too . . . well . . . you know?



I do envy them their profound connection to nature. Their cosmology that unites humans to nature parallels many aspects of Eastern mysticism (the Chakras) and ancient Minoan culture's labyrinth symbol, figured as both a square and a circle, indicating Mother Earth. It suggests the deep ties between

the Earth and its Chosen people. These 2 figurations are used extensively in their cultural artifacts. As per their creation myth, "Spider Woman" created the earth, the plants, the flowers, all kinds of seed-bearers, the birds and animals. A dark purple light defined the start of creation, which I can still see in the New Mexican sky today, along with the yellow and red colors that followed during the creation of fully-formed humans.

Each day from my home in Aldea I watch the universe being recreated as the sun rises in the east and plays hide-and-seek with the clouds. I've come to better understand the Native's connection to nature each day I live here. No wonder so many artists continue to paint these lands, photograph them, write about them. Why before the lockdown I spent so many hours haunting the Georgia O'Keefe Museum — well — not the *only* reason. I bought a print, *Black Mesa Landscape* (1930), for my living room. The foreground renders low hills as vaginal-like folds in near flesh-colored hues. Certainly, feminist artist Judy Chicago later found inspiration in O'Keefe's translation of nature into womanly shapes.



Albuquerque, NM: Vigilante (from New Mexico Civil Guard) shoots protester while guarding the controversial statue of Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate against it being torn down.

We need Native American beliefs more than ever to help heal the enormous breach between the spiritual and material, the conscious and unconscious we Westerners suffer. In addition, there is the ancient strife between Native peoples and their Spanish conquerors still stirring passions as seen in the violence today in ABQ over a statue honoring an especially brutal Spanish conquistador. History has been written by the conqueror, but now the conquered are rewriting it from their perspective, demanding to be listened to. Meanwhile, gun-toting right-wing militia (here, the New Mexico Civil Guard) attempt to enforce the discourse of imperialism by appealling to "history," but Hitler was part of history, too. Do we honor him with statues? Two Hearts won't chastise these damn vigilantes, they are part of his "base". Sick, sour men whose guns are symbolic extensions of their little dicks, their

feelings of impotence in a world turning against white male dominance. People who'd have ardently supported Hitler and Mussolini in the 1930s.

Noonie was of the belief we had much to learn from First Nations People. He could hardly suppress his excitement upon telling me about initially reading *Shaking the Pumpkin* by Jerome Rothenberg in 1975, the year he got his MFA. In exclamation marks he related how this was a ground-breaking text of experimental ethnopoetics that brought Amerindian poetry to readers in such a manner that the *total* poetry of Native culture — the dances, the vowel changes, the pauses, the movement, the interaction between speaker and audience — was revealed. A Conceptual artist at that time, he said that text changed his creative life, made clear the "sympathy" between postmodern aesthetics and Native expression.

A 2015 project by Noonie put a slew of Native American artists' (Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Edgar Heap of Birds, Will Wilson, etc.) work on flash drives, finding old brick



Noonie's "Wall Flowers Project" (2015) West Loop brick building, Chicago.



Sculptor Charles Simmonds creating a Wall Dwelling.

structures, chiseling out the cement in between the bricks, inser-ting the drive so the USB metal head stuck out, and then recementing it in. With a felt-tip pen he wrote ART GALLERY next to it, inviting the curious to plug their laptop into the odd digital database. Every month, he'd delete the old files, replacing them with new images scanned from books or downloaded from artists' websites. It was like rotating exhibitions in a gallery.

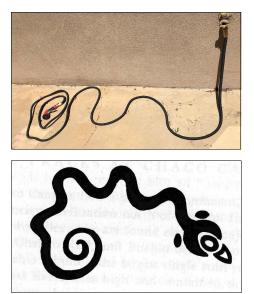
Galleries showed little contemporary Native American art in Chicago, so this bit of subversion was a nice strike at the staid gallery scene there. He told me he got the idea from watching sculptor Charles Simmonds install a wall-sited miniature "cliff dwelling" in the old Museum of Contemporary Art's building then located in a small space in Chicago's north Loop.

I'm so glad Noonie isn't here to see the government's weak



Charles Simmonds, Wall Dwelling.

response to the current needs of these remarkable people. Watching the death statistics on the reservations rise on my large TV screen, injures my heart, wounds my knee. I dip deep into my purse to contribute, in my name and Noonie's, to the First Nations Development Institute. BTW, the 1898 smallpox epidemic reduced the Hopi population to 1,832.

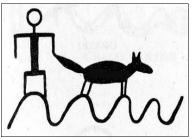


Serpent Mound sketch (Tokchi'i).

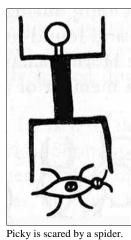
I was going to have an early prime rib dinner at Rio Chama Steak House near the State House tonight. Dress up, look alluring. Sit so as to position my profile for maximum effect. Play with my blue mask like Spanish maidens at court. Be a real charmer. But monsoon season is upon us. Threatening skies. Bad storms predicted.

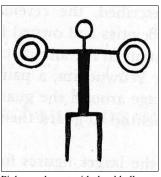
Around 5 p.m. a strong, gusty, dusty wind; a brief shower dirties my car. I hose it down, seeing my black hose laying in a configuration similar to that of the Great Serpent Mound near Louden, Ohio, which Hopi say is the Guardian Snake of the East, *Tokchi'i*, and attribute it to one of their ancient migrating clans). I was just this morning reading in *Book of the Hopi* about this 1,348-feet-long, 3-feet-high wonder, located

on a plateau along Ohio Brush Creek in Adams County, Ohio. A coincidence? Noonie's toss of the Comic Dice? I would normally not register this event, but too many such coincidences are occurring to me these days. Again, similarities between my activities and Hopi pictographs:



Picky walks her black dog up and down Aldea's hills.





Picky works out with dumbbells.

Ticky is scaled by a spider.

* *

Night. Rains hard off 'n on. Ceiling beams creak. My veranda still wet this a.m. Good for my plants. I have cinnamon stick flavored oatmeal garnished with blueberries and sliced bananas for breakfast. Used to make it for Noonie. Good for me.

I don my broad-brimmed hat, carry my mask and homemade hand-sanitizer, rev up "Lexstacy", and off I go to 2 stores located on Cerrillos Road. Home Depot's garden store for sunflower seeds. El Camino Real Imports for a turquoise-colored metallic Hopi symbol for *Kuwánlelenta*, the god of their Sunflower Clan, for mounting near my garden.



Off-Road VW, Home Depot Parking Lot (from "The Car Series", 2020) Picky Hunting.



Hopi Sunflower sketch.



Kuwánlelenta symbol.

First stop, Home Depot. I park near a spooky "offroad" VW. I imagine the macho driver doesn't use a face mask. Crowded lot. Folks not wearing masks. Long line to get in. Holding my breath, even with mask on, I quickly bee-line it to the seed display for their Ferry-Morse brand sunflower seeds. Picky picks 2 packets. Then to the social distanced check-out line. Half the customers *sans* mask or wear it like a silly chin guard. I say nothing. Don't want to be coughed on. Total time in the store: 20 minutes or in Noonie notation, 5 + 5 + 5 + 5. Backing out of my parking spot, a black Dodge 4 x 4 nearly clips my rear end. The hassle is worth it. In about 90 days I will have beautiful plants.

The sunflower has great significance to the Hopi. It resembles the sun, which represents creative power and spiritual desire for enlightenment and truth. The flower also represents femininity and womanhood. The Hopi believe them to be living beings brought to life by the gods. I will bring to life in my garden.



Because . . . It Makes Me Happy (2020) Picky Hunting.

Next, I wind my way up a congested Cerrillos Road, hefty trucks sniffing my ass all the way to the El Camino Real store to pick up my *Kuwánlelenta* figure. I had to call 20 stores before I found it. This Hopi god signifies fertility and beauty (the name translates as "To Make Beautiful Surroundings"). Hopi girls are sometimes given that name.

As a gardener *I* make beautiful surroundings. I *am* "*Kuwánlelenta*" on my own soil, trowel in hand, a knee bent. This is why this icon will soon grace my garden wall among the purples, yellows, and reds of my lush plants.

Driving back home on St. Francis Drive, a marvelous mural painted in the Hopi creation colors of blue, yellow, and red catches my eye. I swing off the road, horn blaring behind me, to photograph it. When I step out of the car, I see, ironically, it has the name "Kelly Moore" rendered on it, a brand of house paint. Ergo, the mural names the very material used to create it. Noonie'd like that. My tally for this morning? Two successful shopping stops. Two interesting photo ops. Two hours work.



Conquistador Diego de Vargas' statue in Santa Fe is removed.

On to the afternoon. I play my recording of last night's 10 p.m. KOAT TV News. Discover Diego de Vargas, infamous for leading the reconquest of the Indigenous People's territory in 1692 following the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, has just had his memorial removed. De Vargas had been commemorated annually during the Fiestas de Santa Fe in our city here. No longer. Zip! — gone. I once photographed Noonie before it. Bet the De Vargas Center (a local mall) will soon be renamed, too. I hope's named the Fred Harvey Center. Some Latinos not happy, though. I suppose, in 50 years, when the Russians invade and conquer us (thanks to Two Hearts weakening us), more statues will be toppled, names changed to honor famous Russians: Santa Fe Plaza = Red Squre; La Fonda Hotel = Putin On-the-Ritz.; St. Francis Drive = Stalin Car Drive; Santa Fe State House = Kerensky Center.

Concerning this hot topic, Vita's told me of New Mexican *Star Trek*-inspired artist Virgil Ortiz's on-going Indigenous-futurist project, *Revolt 1680/2180*, a continuing story set during the 1680 Indian revolt against Spanish rule and continuing into the next century and realized in murals, videos, sci-fi sculptures (*http://www.virgilortiz.com*).

Other news. The famous October Balloon Festival is, as of now, cancelled.





And our Immanent Baboon's Republican Rally in Tulsa has gone bust (like I hope Trump's inflated ego will when he loses the election). What with doing recruiting work for COVID XIX and being trumped by TikTok Teens and K-Pop Stans who sank Trump Rally attendance, the event fizzled; albeit, Two Hearts tried to fire up his audience with racist fears. Yet, according to a source close to Trump, on a Rage Index of 1 - 10, the Baboon's anger hit 15 (Noonie number 5 + 5 + 5).

Yes, overall a nice day's work. Except for the Balloon Festival bad news. I love balloons.

* *

Many centuries ago — ah, a story! — when Sityatki was a prospering village, a beautiful girl lived at a corner of the plaza. Young men from Awatovi and Walpi as well as those from Sikyatki came to court her. The courting was simple. A boy would come in the evening and talk to her through the little of the room where she was grinding corn. So starts chapter 10 in Book of the Hopi.

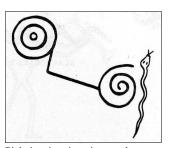
This Hopi narrative develops into the description of a race between a boy from the Coyote Clan and a boy from the Swallow Clan, both courting a maiden. She, being a bit picky (like me) chooses the Coyote suitor over the Swallow. But the Swallow Clan vehemently protests. A race for the hand of this maiden is suggested — winner take all (the girl, the head of the loser). Each wears a short kirtle, a feather in the hair designating their clan, and a line of red paint across nose and cheeks. Both runners are aided by magical interventions peculiar to their clan's powers during the long distance race (to counter the Swallow's swiftness, the Coyote ascends into the sky of a magic flying shield). Nearing the finish, it's neck and neck but, ultimately, Swallow boy lost. Lost the maiden and was decapitated with an obsidian knife by his rival. "Heads, you loose!"

Shit. I was cheering for the Swallow boy! I hate coyotes, but love birds and to swallow good cuisine. Speaking of cuisine, a Hopi staple is corn meal; a meal of corn — a spicy corn chowder from kernels cut-off from amazingly large, perfect cobs — will be my delight tonight. I love corn. Noonie loved corn. Noonie was corny. Q.E.D.

Meat-eating tribes call the Hopi Corn-Eaters. The Navajo believe the prototypes for humans were created from corn. For the Hopi, corn symbolically unites the 2 principles of Creation, the male and female. A perfect ear ending in 4 full kernels is called Corn Mother. Corn and corn meal is used in many ceremonies. I love corn.

My swift hands have denuded many cobs over a life-time of cooking. At 76, I still can do my joke-telling, shrimp-flipping, knife-swinging Benihana chef imitation with expert precision. When Noonie 1st saw me do this, his jaw dropped, his eyelids raised.

That Hopi maiden's courting story got me thinking about my future romantic prospects. What "clan" would I tell a potential date I belong to? The Pumpkin Clan (from



Picky's migration pictograph; upper left, her state during lockdown; lower right, she migrates toward a new relationship, aware the man might be a "slithering snake".

Oraibi, they later settled in Moencopi, Arizona). Why pumpkin? Noonie often called me his "Pumpkin-haired Cutie" due to my hair color. I also make a mean pumpkin pie.

Ethnology tersely defines a Hopi clan as "a totemically named, exogamous, unilateral aggregation of matrilineal kindred." The 4 top Hopi clans are: Bear, Parrot, Eagle, and Badger. The chief of each clan held the title *Nalöönongmomgwit*. A real mouthful. I know if Noonie was here now, he'd adopt that tag for sure, seeing hiding inside that humongous name: "Noonie," "Looney," "Loon," "Non," "Mom," and "Wit." I agree it'd be appropriate. He'd give me

Don't be fooled by first impressioins.

l



Ed: Retired life insurance executive seeks a life of reassurance with a gourmet chef who doesn't suffer carpal tunnel.



My profile picture on OurTime.com.

bear hugs, *parrot* writers he liked, had an *eagle* eye for good design, but would often *badger* me.

Like the Hopi's Emergence and migrations (see pictograph on page 143), I must emerge from my lonely "kiva", migrate to the Net in search of a new partner. So, with some reluctance, I again log onto the men's dating profiles on OurTime.com. And find "Ed, a retired life insurance executive."

First impression? BAD! But my Lu Lu's fortune cookie warns me . . . At least his portrait is professionally done, not some sloppy selfie. Sounds like he'd enjoy my Benihana dinner dance routine, too. So may be . . .

BTW, the carpal tunnel syndrome reference is interesting, as I'm finding more profiles mentioning it:

"Ex-IT guy with no carpal tunnel."

"Even though I have carpal tunnel, there is light at the end of it."

"Carpal tunnel, I have, but it's a tunnel of love — with you . . ."

"No card-players need apply. I got carpal tunnel from playing Bridge with my ex."

"Retired Las Vegas casino dealer with carpal tunnel seeks same."

"Former yo-yo world champion with carpal tunnel wants to share life with similarly afflicted lady."

So many people, abusing their hands and wrists at computer desks and other repetitive labor, in need to companionship.

I've decided to add an *honest* profile picture, show I have some anxiety about dating again. A man, after seeing that photo, would *have* to be very picky to contact me. Agree?

That night a dream: a mysterious figure in a black mask with white imprints of human hands on his black cloak, holding a black staff painted with white rings, and wearing wildcat skins on his feet appears, asks, "Who are you?" I reply, "I am I."

* * *

12.0





Hopi Hero Twins.

The Hopi's supreme law: respect, harmony, and love. All fine qualities that Two Hearts is incapable of. Disrespect, sowing chaos and hate — that Baboon's traits. A self-will that has to dominate. A will-to-dominate that his marginalized groupies vicariously bask in. And he thinks Native Americans are losers! Ha!

John Bolton digging Trump's political grave.

In Hopi myth, two Hero Twins sit at the opposite ends of earth's north-south axis, keeping the earth properly rotating. *Pöqánghoya* at the north, *Palöngawhoya* at the south. They warn of anything wrong on the planet by sending vibrations along that axis to all earth-centers, represented by a small clay bell receiving and resounding these vibrations (like the one hanging in my garden). Those Twins must be very busy these days. Getting carpal tunnel syndrome from vigorously working that axis line.

Bipolar, astrological sign Gemini, Noonie would've nodded approval at that Hopi cosmological conception: Twins maintaining earth's balance. He might even have called his "two selves" Poe and Pal, respectively. Poe (Pö) being his critical, poetic self, Pal being his softer complimentary, joking self.

Together they maintained Noonie's emotional balance. Kept him spinning on a proper axis. Respect, harmony, love. That defined my relationship with sweet Noonie. My



Confused twins, pasted into one of Noonie's Moleskine notebooks.

thoughts do an abrupt U-turn back to my true friend, confidant, lover, and sparring partner who rides rode with me along the Great Arrow of Life. A man with more depth than the Laurentian Abyss.

When my little Westie, Nessie, died in my arms, he remarked to the



Picky visiting Delphi, Greece (1966).

attending vet, "How could this small body hold so immense a thing as death?" Even with a thread of hard winter riding the cobalt horizon during one of Chicago's infamous winter-within-winters, he warmed me with his smile as romance danced just beyond the firelight in his eyes. He was academically trained, but his eyes fled the cold light of logic and data collection when they were directed at me.

There are vectors at work out there that brought us together in a particular way, in particular setting, at a chosen yet unexpected time, with the outcome known only

to those curious gods of chance and logic. The Toss of the Comic Dice. We met in Chicago when he was 49, I being 3 years his senior. When I was showing him my old photo album, he stopped over a photograph of me at Delphi. Greece when I was 22, had just graduated from university. I now recall that photo vividly. Noonie became very excited — this was early in our courting, the late 90s — he vowed to write me a delightful romantic fantasy about how we might have met there in our youth, so as to have already been together most of our lives at this point:

Picky, imagine us as student tourists. We find ourselves in Delphi. When I first see you it is from behind and to the side, your long red hair flowing down like water, or echoing the vertical fluting on the Ionic column fragment. We both are drawn towards the column and then toward each other.

I get your attention with one of my bad puns, something like: "Isn't it ironic we are both looking at this iconic Ionic," or "That fluting makes me think of your hair and champagne glasses," or "The column speaks volutes and volumes about your sweet charms," or "You'd think that Greece and Turkey would see they go together like love 'n marriage — both are meant to sizzle. So why the hostility?" Dumb stuff like that. Bad puns which once, after our marriage, you'll term "punishment".

You, my "Pythia," turn to look at who this crazed dude is, only to be surprised to see more in the future than discounted airline tickets, shuffleboard, and a condo on the edge of a Scottsdale golf course. In short time, at a local taverna, I am ordering us green column, Mythos beer, "The Green One" in local parlance, and pushing cold dolmades and hot conversation at you. Discussion about Greek myth, history, and philosophy — Pythia, the female mouthpiece for Apollo's oracles at Delphi; Prometheus, Giver of Fire, the frustrated Tantalus (me); Diogenes of Sinope who died of eating raw octopus (I find out you hate octopus), and Menippus, whose literary devices will later inspire me, to Freud and

psychoanalysis, which you are eager to discuss, and ending with art and politics, where we both agree on avant-garde, liberal agendas.

Alcohol from several "Green Ones" leads me to adumbrate something about "the overriding problem of our country," and that "we are managed by incompetents." To which you add, "Most of whom are men." Which you follow with, "And who have spent their lives seeking senorita red-hot tabasco and raw power rather than something deeper in themselves." Adding the coda, "Which prevent them from taking the lead and leading us in proper fashion." Mouths gaping, eyes-into-eyes, we both are startled how easily two people's dialogue can become a Shakespearean soliloquy à deux.

In time, I feel safe enough to confide about my non-stop reading and bibliophilia, my need for solitary confinement. In reply, you hit the perfect note: "Yep, with that policy in place, you will have fewer people at your funeral, but you'll get in more reading time." I laugh. Then start in on how my mother always remarked that my heroes were, well, a little different from those of other boys: Socrates, for bravely downing the hemlock; René Descartes for demanding clear and distinct ideas; Chief Geronomo for giving his name to the bold expression "Geronomo!" yelled by leaping paratroopers; pro-wrestler Gorgeous George for his blatant, dirty underhanded tricks; Louis-Fernand Céline for his erratic punctuation; bicyclist Knud Enemark Jensen, for dying of heat stroke during competition in the 1960 Olympics; test-pilot Chalmers "Slick" Goodlin (not Chuck Yeager, but an earlier pilot of the experimental Bell X-1 supersonic jet) for pissing off management by demanding extra pay to fly the damn thing, and so forth and so on. Later, Lori Mathews and Masaaki Nakamura, art spectators killed by falling artworks, were added to the list.

Finally, later that momentous night, after several ouzos down the hatch, I play my trump card, as my eyes bounce from your feet to your face with the casual arc of a rubber ball, and tell you that you are oh so full of blood and personality. That I've spent years running toward someone like you; how I tossed in beds in isolated Arabian desert towns wanting for someone like you; how I stared off balconies at midnight in deep Asia and imagined your hair as I watched old dhows tug at their moorings as they long for the thrash of coastal water. My deepest wishes now coming true in my vision of you, us now sitting inside Taverna Vakhos, Apollonos 31, Dephi, Greece. Munching on baklava, sipping strong Greek coffee, I point out a cosmic marvel to you: "The sun's mirrored in a coffee spoon. The sun's mirrored even in a coffee spoon! We're mirrored there, too, see?"

Love, Noonie.

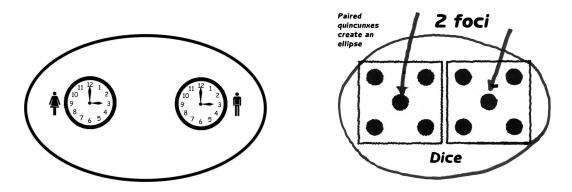
Well, tears were forming like sap at the meeting of my eyelids after I read that clever, heart-tugging love story. It got me rumbling inside with more power than a motor. Although the story was pure wish, the tone of the narrative was genuine and point on. Pure Noonie. My love for him was instantly sealed. The rest was, as cliché has it, history.



Until death intervenes. As witty Asian detective Charlie Chan (Sidney Toller) put it in one his adventures: "Events break suddenly like firecrackers in the face of innocent passersby." Innocent passersby certainly saw my Noonie splatter on a Chicago sidewalk. In my nightmares I see that bloodied dream-face, body crushed by a fatal 22-story dive. This is a recurring horror I sleep with, a mystery yet to be solved.

For the PI gumshoe — and me — the pursuit of clarity churns up unexpected complexity. Sherlock Holmes, in "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches", bemoans that he's found 7 separate explanations, each which covers the facts of the case. That seems to be my fate, too.

But Noonie and I had respect, harmony, and love in our long relationship. We were synchronous clocks, foci of an ellipse in time. Noonie thought it significant that a pair of dice showing 5s (a pair of quincunxes) trace an ellipse. An ellipse, he told me, was symbolic of the shift from myth (the ancients' belief in circular planetary orbits) to science (Kepler's discovery of the elliptical orbit of Mars).* That's why I *ultimately* believe (must believe!) Noonie did not jump from the Cliff Dwellers balcony of his own volition. He would never leave me alone to suffer. That is my faith, my creed.



Trying to watch the 10 p.m. news. Over and over again I fall asleep with my elliptical eyes open, knowing I'm falling asleep, unable to prevent it. When I fall asleep in this way, my open eyes are cut off from my ordinary mind as though they were shut, but they become directly connected to a new extraordinary mind which grows increasingly competent at fighting the hatred and divisiveness that the TV news reports tend (and *are* intended) to arouse.

* *

^{*} Aby Warburg (d. 1929), a German art historian and cultural theorist, said the ellipse was not among the perfect forms as set forth by Plato; the discovery of elliptical planetary orbits by Kepler was therefore a rejection of ancient cosmological myths and thus heralded the advent of modern scientific thought. Noonie preferred what he called "elliptical thinking."

Morning News. "Events break suddenly like firecrackers." American streets are targets. A senior in a golf cart hails "White Power," while an anti-fascist protester yells "Nazi!"; manic fireworks endanger our streets, mock artillery meant to *both* celebrate and intimidate. Either way, reckless. Uncaring of others. As is the blatant lack of social distancing and mask usage. As the fireworks shoot up, explode, so do the cases of infection. Suffering. Death.



Yet images coming from Trump rallies show young people, indifferent to their vulnerability, to that of their elders, unmasked, acting like snake-charmed Hitler Youth and pre-Enlightenment "Primitives".



Neo-Primitive celebrates at Trump Rally, Arizona. A far cry from the Love-Generation of the Sixties.



Trump retweets this White Power guy's rant at a rally.



St. Louis residents arm themselves as black protesters march by; Congressman Matt Gaetz approves of this behavior.

And then, BREAKING NEWS, SANTA FE: "When Bajit Singh walked into his India Palace restaurant to prepare for a busy dinner service Monday afternoon, he found his restaurant destroyed and racial slurs spray-painted all over the walls."



India Palace owner surveys the \$100,000 damage to his restaurant by neo-Nazis.

I am sickened. I hadn't expected this in Santa Fe. So close to my new home. A beautifully decorated restaurant so close to my heart, now capable of torturing my heart. When Noonie and I were here a few years ago, we dined there, we felt extremely close, the exotic flavors bringing out the romantic in each of us.

I retreat from my office to my guest bedroom, to the new turquoise sofa bed I recently bought from American Home Furniture. I need to lick the wound. I lie down and stretch out. Don't pull out the queen-size mattress as that would require shuffling furniture about. On the walls of this small room, as yet not used by guests due to the Reign of COVID XIX, hang many artworks from Noonie's collection (e.g., photo, page 102). By now I had expected to host my BFF, Melanie, my sons and the rambunctious grandkids. Cook them their favorite foods, even challenge their palates with new Southwestern-flavored fare.

Noonie loved sofas. He could nap in an instant on a good sofa. But it had to be the right sofa. He could rattle off a list of "sacred sofas" he'd slept on. Even had photos of some, like the much loved "sofa of sofas" in his Uncle Don's lake cottage on Pelican Lake,

Wisconsin. He was in full agreement with Japanese author Haruki Murakami's sharp observations: "You can tell a lot about a person's character from his choice of sofa. Sofas constitute a realm inviolate unto themselves. . . . One good sofa breeds another good sofa. . . . Procuring a good sofa . . . requires style and experience." Amen, to that.

It took me some time, testing each sofa, sitting and stretching out on it, for me find the precise sofa for me, asking myself What Would Noonie Do? American Home Furniture had a sign out: 25% DISCOUNT ON RAINY DAYS. It *was* raining! Very rare. A salesman, Mitchell Dofflemyer, assisted me. Another toss of the Comic Dice! Noonie's protective, upperclass high school buddy was a Michael Dofflemyer. "Doff," said Noonie, "protected me from the jerk bullies in my freshman class, some of whom looked like their testicles hadn't yet dropped. Tall, strong, Doff already sported a dark 'morning shadow' on his face." As per Noonie, those same bullies constantly harassed Hope's adopted son, Kelley, who was in Noonie's class. Kelley didn't have Doff's Big Guy protection. Left school after the 1st year. Yet, Bob Hope fully funded a new student center at the school. But I digress.

I am on the sofa. Trying to calm myself by reading the sum of the "room feelings" I've carefully orchestrated here. My eyes stray to a photo on the wall. It is a snap I made of



Southwest Ornaments, front yard (2020) Picky Hunting.

a steer's skull I bought and placed in my front yard near my intriguing metal bench made of horseshoes. Trying to amp up the Southwest theme in my outdoor decor. I reach up to the end table and grab my iPad. Log into my Facebook account and do a posting:

"BREAKING SNOOZE: Picky Hunting is about to take 2 Ambien, 2 blue Aleve gel caps. She will try whistling *Danny Boy* to further relax herself, hoping it doesn't sound like one of her dogs on their daily walk, wheezing from the Saharan Dust blowing around the globe and invading U.S. territory. An immigrant the Immanent Baboon is helpless to stop."



Soon, I am dreaming: I put on my hefty Arizona Biltmore bathrobe. Go outside. I pick up that white steer's skull. It is midnight. I place it on the horseshoe bench, kneel before it. The skull is enveloped in profound silence and darkness, except for the ethereal glow from my iPhone illuminating it. The silence seems to originate from inside the skull. Its leached colorlessness slowly alters, tones turning part positive, part negative. I feel part joy, part sadness before it. I notice a slight depression in the forehead, which starts to glow. Do I really hear a humming coming from it? Light seems to move about inside the skull. The night remains deep and still. Am I actually listening and seeing memories, memories from the past of this creature, or his ancestors? Leather chapped cowboys on horses, a vast stampede; an endless stream of Southwest sounds and images unfold before me: Bearded Conquistadores and American horse soldiers, gleaming swords, smoking guns, zipping arrows. Navajo and Hopi. Human skulls with the tops bashed in. Dead children.

* *



Yersinia Pestis' e-card.

I awaken the next day. Shaken. A new day. My birthday, in fact! My iPad's dinging with messages. Even an e-card from that Yersinia Pestis woman! Facebook friends are lavishing me with H-B's. Some mention Noonie, too. I am 76 today. I've slept for hours and hours on this sofa and no stiff muscles. A minor miracle. A sofa of sofas!

Vitalina hasn't contacted me for

some time. Ill? Working on a new project? Or maybe she just dropped me? No, not dropped me. Today she e-mails me, wishing me "Happy Birthday," apologizing for the long silence. To her message she adds a Vimeo link to a video political performance. "I call it *Ya Ya*, Picky, which I just did during the quarantine."

Curious, I hit the link and log-on, see her sitting on a kitchen stool wearing — much to my amazement — a Hopi *manta* woven of dark brown and indigo-dyed wool; faded green piping divides this manta into 3rd s where upper and lower 1/3 are crafted using a brocade diamond pattern. She is draped in a white cape, her hair done up in squash-blossom whorls, and on her forehead is a squash blossom made of corn husks painted white and yellow. She holds a spruce branch which she handles as deftly as Spanish maiden her fan. She holds up a title sign crudely written in black felt-tip: I AM HÉHEWÚTI, THE WARRIOR MOTHER.

She begins to declaim, looking at the 4 compass points as she does so, "People of West, hear my call and come! People of the East, hear my call and come! People of the South, hear my call and come! People of the North, hear my call and come!" She then slowly stands up and looks directly at the camera in total silence for a minute, then says: "People of our village, of Santa Fe, we disdain what happened to India Palace; we want you to be of the humblest nature for the next sixteen days. Make no loud noises. Do not honk horns. Speak in soft tones. Do not raise voice against others. Be so cool, so cool, it'll rattle racist bones. But to all immigrants, raise your voice in welcome using the Hopi greeting *Yung-ai*! Come in! Gather the wild grain called *nööna* and gift them with such."

I note the sly (unintended?) Noonie reference.

"I will fast for four days. On the fourth day, *Pikitotokya* ('Piki-Making Day'), I will make a flat blue corn meal *piki* (bread) hoping to evoke the assistance of the powerful kachina *Chowílawu* (Join Together) whose power can give severe leg muscle spasms to the Evil Ones, crippling White racists, restricting them to riding around in golf carts."

She does a Hopi dance, chanting (remember part-Native ancestry):

Ah — ho — liiiiiiiiiiii. Ah — ho — liiiiiiiiiii. Ah — ho — liiiiiiiiiii. Holi — holi — ho — liiiiiiiiii.



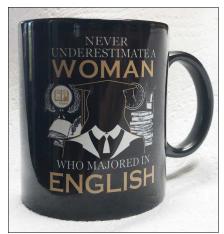
Then she lets out a long sigh — "Hu huh hu uh uh uhah" — slowly sinking to the ground, right arm pointing west. She repeats this performance twice, explaining each time: "For only through assiduous repetition is it possible to redistribute skewed tendencies."

Vita's e-mail advises me: "Picky, please read *Native Apparitions: Critical Perspectives on Hollywood's Indians* edited by Steve Pavlik, et al.; see Chadwick Allen's essay (page 88) for an elaboration on Renato Resaldo's provocative

idea of 'imperialist nostalgia,' that is, the dominant culture's mourning for that which it had attempted to destroy. Allen's essay on the Tonto figure uses Resaldo's analysis to unpack how in films, books, and on TV that figure fuels nostalgia for the very processes of those attempts at genocide." And, Vita continues, "Note the Piki-Making Day reference in my video? Maybe every forth day, that is, *today*, you should make that flat bread! Delicious."

I think, To heck with futzing with corn meal, but a meal of corn-on-the-cob, OK, and I like the idea of having a Picky-Making Day, a day devoted to "growing" ME. Especially when it coincides with my birthday.

I write back, immediately, thanking Vita, for the vid-clip and, with a certain amount of glee, informing her that my late- hubby grew up only 5 miles from the Chatsworth-located California homes of Roy Rodgers and Jay Silverheels (TV's Tonto). That his sister's best friend later had Jay on her U.S. mail route. Moreover, that Noonie's sister, working as a cashier at a Sizzler Steak House franchise in Chatsworth, had taken cash from Charlie Manson's hands many times — this was before she knew who he was, before his arrest at the very ranch she and Noonie had ridden staid horses as kids. I know this will "up" my status with Vita. I hit "send" and go to the kitchen to prepare a late breakfast.



Picky's Never Underestimate a Woman Who Majored in English coffee mug.

I grab my English Major-theme coffee cup, an old birthday gift from Melanie. She got it for me as she knew I was Garrison Keillor fan, especially of his weekly comic riff on English majors: G.K.: . . . brought to you by the Partnership of English Majors — (THEME) It's a beautiful thing, majoring in English, devoting yourself to the classics of English literature. . . .

I make my famous (according to Noonie) heart-shaped cranberry orange pancakes. I decide it is so nice out — to eat on my veranda. The clouds are stacking up over my neighbor's home. I rush to my iPhone and snap a flick Ansel Adams might have liked.



Stacks (2020) Picky Hunting.

Sipping coffee, taking dainty bites of pancake, I open my birthday cards. Savor them, slowly. Funniest is from Mel: "Old People Graffiti (Big Print Edition)" on the front. Inside, are bits of elder wisdom culled from bathroom stalls:

For a good time, call somebody YOUNGER. I went from raisin' cain to lowerin' my cholesterol. If you can READ THIS, your bifocals are working.

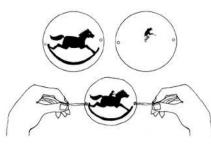


Maybe I should put the 1st quip on my OurTime.com posting, screen out the sex addicts, encourage academics? No.

I do decide to change that off-putting profile photo I'd previously uploaded. Here's the improved version and my comment: "Want to be my feathered friend, me yours?" Like it? I think I might get a nibble. It would've been catnip to Noonie.

* * *

13.0



July 4th. "Ill Picco" in the Reign of COVID XIX (I play on *illness* and *il picco*, Italian referring to the peak in coronavirus deaths). Political illness and biological illness now superimpose like 2 spinning images combining in a thaumatrope illusion. This model helps me to understand the distribution of more than 10.7 million deaths globally as the failure of

those individuals who preside over global politics. I ponder: Is capitalist globalization biologically sustainable?

His majesty COVID XIX dines on our racialized inequalities and delights in gaggles of indifferent Millennial jesters stuffing bars *sans* masks and holding COVID fêtes in his name at the Lake of the Ozarks or at Alabama COVID college parties with infected guests and bets placed on who comes down with the illness 1st, winner take all. Seventeenth-century diarist Samuel Pepys left a chilling account of London's Great Plague:

The taverns are fair full of gadabouts making merry this eve. And though I may press my face against the window like an urchin at a confectioner's, I am tempted not by the sweetmeats within. A dram in exchange for the pox is an ill bargain indeed.



COVID party: the latest in the expression of the American death-drive.

Making matters worse: we have no Mourner-in-Chief to help us channel our grief. Two Hearts can't help us grieve for the dead because he won't admit they exist. Acts as a faithful servant to His Malevolent Majesty by hosting a fire-in-the-works political rally at





Homo Millennial Stupidus (2016) as posed and photographed by Noonie. It's not an accident that the unempathetic anti-lockdown protesters accelerated their cause as it became known COVID XIX preferred the lives of people of color and those "losers" with pre-existing conditions. The only pre-existing conditions that merit praise in that culture is *white* and *young*.

Mount Rushmore to spread his Word of Death. His Majesty is allowed to consume human beings if the upside is profit (financial and racial). Following up from the rear of COVID's ravaging royal train are strange looking people outfitted head-to-toe in Tyvek suits — translucent face-shields and shoe coverings. They squint at each other at times, trying to recognize one another. An unending double line of coffins on collapsible rolling carts follow them from a safe distance. I flash on disturbing scenes from Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* that takes place during a medieval plague, but unlike the movie, we are not all playing at the same chessboard. And, today, unlike most Hollywood films, a man is more likely to be celebrated for the bad he does, rather than the good.

I feed dogs. Eat a breakfast of Honey Nut Cheerios with real honey (saw a kid doing a 5-finger

discount on a box when I grabbed mine). Munching, I watch a white and gray mix of suntouched clouds meander about the Sangre de Cristos. Then I grab my iPad to find it's exploding with "Happy Fourth of July" greetings in e-mails and Facebook postings. One spam e-mail — it asks me if I want a "bar-raiser" to "coax you out of lockdown apathy" somehow dodges my mail filter. I see Noonie's old bud, Lew, sends a link to *View from a Hotel Window, Butte, Montana* (1955) by Robert Frank, a photo in his famous photobook *The Americans*. He comments: "Picky, I think this is the most depressing image found in Frank's book. It's as if he was under a COVID lockdown, stuck in a trashy hotel, alone, in

the dank mining town of Butte for months. Imagine what he would make of our situation today if he hadn't died before our present crisis? And Vita sends a dire message: "How can we *really* celebrate Independence Day? It'd be more honest to refer to it as Co-Dependence Day, as our largely racist communities are co-dependent on racist police (as seen in Aurora, CO) to maintain white-dominance." She attaches a pdf listing Aurora, Colorado's police misconduct over 5 years, reoccurring shameful acts which were either not rigorously addressed or swept under the rug by complicit city officials:

Aurora Police Misconduct since March 2015:

On 2 March 2015, An Aurora officer shot and killed Naeschylus Carter-Vinzant while trying to serve a warrant. He was unarmed. The matter was settled with a payment of over two and a half million dollars

New reports indicate that on 29 June 2015, arrested a pickpocket Jeffery Gale. Seven Aurora officer handcuffed and hog-tied him. They then repeatedly attacked him with a Taser.

On 14 November 2015, Aurora police officers illegally arrested Dwight Crews after ordering him from his house. They had no warrant for his arrest. The matter was settled with a payment of \$35,000.

On 22 December 2015, OyZhana Williams drove a man to the emergency room for treatment of a gunshot wound. There, several Aurora officers attacked her, slamming her head the ground and stomping on her. The matter was settled with a payment of \$335,000.

On 19 February 2016, Aurora police officers detained Dashan Kelly as he was near the scene of a crime. Although he did not resist the police, they attacked him with a Taser The matter was settled out of court for \$110,000.

On 16 March 2016, Aurora officers entered a coffee shop and approached Omar Hassan who was eating a muffin. With their hands on their guns they ordered out of the store telling him, "Your kind of business is not welcome here." The matter was settled for \$40,000.

On 2 June 2016, in a case of mistaken identity, police entered a home without a warrant and handcuffed two men. The matter was settled with a payment of \$150,000.

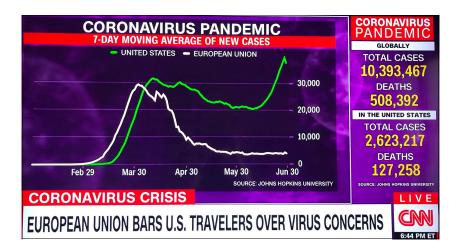
In March 2019, Officer Nate Meier was found in his uniform and official police vehicle asleep. A blood test showed five times the legal limit of alcohol. Aurora officers responding to the situation turned off their body cameras, failed to test a clear liquid found in a bottle in the car and did not collect evidence that could have been used in a criminal prosecution. After being demoted, Officer Meier remained on the job.

On 24 August 2019, responding to a call of a "suspicious person", the Aurora Police Department arrested Elijah McClain while he was walking home with groceries. McClain subsequently died as a result of police action during the arrest.

In February 2020, an Aurora officer was fired for misconduct during an incident the preceding August. The interim police chief Vanessa Wilson announced the action to the press but refused to elaborate on what the officer might have done.

"Any wonder, Picky, honey, that the most recent blatant *execution* occurred and attempts were made be officials to downplay it?"

I'm having coffee (and, oddly, cigarettes) with my subconscious in a Starbucks whose walls are painted a lima bean green (prior to boiling). She looks like an animated corpse, my mother's corpse. She introduces herself as "Vera Skyne." Her thumbs flutter; her frequent laughter at my comments sounds like hiccups emanating from a foreign mechanism deep in her breast. We discuss "Phantom Cake: On Craving What is Gone". Something to do with mourning in a psychoanalytic sense, using my favorite desert as a trope. After a rather opaque exchange, she seems pleased with me, says: "PeeKee, you are a font of exuberant consumerism and possess an uncommon mastery in pursuing such — you are no dabblededo but you always leave cabinet doors, microwave oven doors, closet doors, shower doors, drawers, and faucets open. But if that's the cost of keeping an open mind, so be it as that alone manages to compensate for the former violations of HMR (homemaker regulations). I encourage you to write during this lonesome time. But that requires great discipline, taking the occasional fencing lesson and, hardest of all, amping up your cumulonimbus mind [Noonie had it in spades].



I awake in a sweat. Start dinner. I "husk the shucks" — as Noonie would comically put it — on cobs of the purest of yellows, to make a sweet repast of corn-crab soup, washed down with 2 dirty martinis. I settle into my TV chair. Popping up on the screen are not celebrations and fireworks, but a dire warning that U.S. citizens won't be able to flee the habitat of the Immanent Baboon for many months. Happy Independence Day!

* *



2018 Tesla Model 3.

Sunset, July 6th, I am limping my way to my #5B mailbox in my pink pedal-pushers and colorful Johnny Was tunic . My good knee is acting up. Soon to be my 2nd not good knee? I use titanium walking sticks now. When I walk outside, I look like I am cross country skiing in a desert. The dogs are watching *Benji the Hunted* on TV.

My short trek up the paved alley scares several lizards and a rabbit into deeper brush. As I pass Matt's condo, I notice his trash out for pick-up:

12 Proseco and 3 Aperol bottles stuffed in his Ibarra's Trash Service green (for glass) garbage container. No surprise. But his Lambo is gone, replaced with a cherry red Tesla! Upon closer examination, it's a Model 3 with autopilot — more appropriately, *auto-pile-it* — a technology with its history of serious mishaps. Obviously used — excuse me, *preowned* — as curb damage to the wheel rims on the right side is marked.

Who'd give up a sexy, hot Lambo for an Elon Musk electrical fire-trap? Matt, I guess. Musk, an Alpha-male shitbag, threatens to move his plant out of California when he and California Governor Gavin Newsom ("California is where the future happens first") clashed over coronavirus restrictions. No surprise Musk tweets he would support inane rapper Kanye West's 2020 bid for President. Noonie's school gave an honorary MFA degree to West (every bad idea has a good reason); albeit, prior to his donning a MAGA hat and ass-licking the Immanent Baboon during a White House visit. Nevertheless, some of Noonie's former students tore up their MFA diplomas in protest. From that day forward, my hubby had written his school off the list of serious educational institutions.



Yesterday, perusing my iPad, I run across someone on eBay selling Tesla Short Shorts: Celebrate summer with Tesla Short Shorts. Run like the wind or entertain like Liberace with our red satin and gold trim design. Relax poolside or lounge indoors year-round with our limited-edition Tesla Short Shorts, featuring our signature Tesla logo in front with "S3XY" across the back. Enjoy exceptional comfort from the closing bell.

Then I notice an anti-Musk blog selling **IHEM** (I Hate

Elon Musk) bumper stickers and spueing discontent. The blog rant began:

Why I hate Elon Musk, and why you should hate him too.

This is just a brief collection of pretty bad things that Elon has done. Because of the rush I made to put this out, I'm going to refine it later in additional parts. Until then, here's **Part 1, The Insider must rise up against the shitbag:** He's an asshole and I hate him. You should hate him too. He's a lot like Donald Trump, lots of promises and lots of words, but very little action. He relies on appealing to one's emotion and excitement.

There follows acerbic comments tracking "the shitbag's" bad attitude and behavior. A sampling:

1)Refuses to investigate Worker Complaints and fires those who are upset about work conditions; 2) Attacks the Press for investigating his companies and the respective profits and losses; 3) Tesla 3 is incredibly unsafe and a mechanic's nightmare.

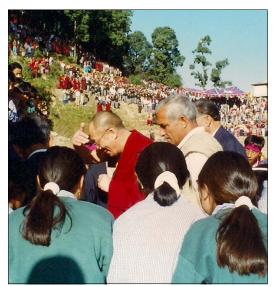
I gather my mail, noticing my dreaded monthly NM water bill. An outside water pipe froze up in February, burst; upon the 1st melt of Spring, it leaked, going unnoticed for a month. I am still paying off, little-by-little, the \$3000 damage to my pride and pocket book. If Noonie'd lived, he'd have sussed out that elusive leak. When it came to water pipes and electrical conduits, he had extrasensory perception. I returning home: pole — foot, pole foot, pole — foot, pole —foot. Upon turning a corner — BA-WING! — my vague feeling of annoyance dissolves in a stirred solution of dramatic sky and clouds, the most intense light display I've witnessed since moving here is before me. I am *breathless* (the title of 1 of Noonie's favorite Godard films) before nature's paint brush. Blues, violets, greens, oranges, whites; fire and water in the air. I am aware . . . that touches on cliché, but so what.

I decide not to cook tonight. Lu Lu's will deliver me a perfect repast.



Virga effect and sunset, Aldea, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.

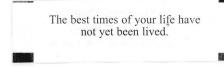
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The Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, India, detail, Lewis Koch.

It is the Dalai Lama's 85th birthday. Noonie's friend, Lew, met him in Dharamsala. This holy man has good advice for us during our current sufferings: "The planet does not need more *successful people* [my emphasis]. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds. . . . [And] if you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito." (A moth flitted about in my bedroom last night.) An apt quote that Lew posted on Facebook, it helps restore my emotional balance after munching on Cheerios, watching sad TV reports of the weekend gun

violence in Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles; young lives needlessly lost. A pandemic of hate as the virus knocks on our gate. It seems apocalyptic. This healing post by Lew, I forward to Vita.



The best of my inner-self yells for me to *Get out of the house!* Inspired by the Dalai Lama's words and the wisdom extolled by the fortune cookie I cracked open last night after hoovering up my Lu

Lu's spicy General Tso's chicken, I decide to let nature restore me. So I flee the coop, despite the record heat forecast.

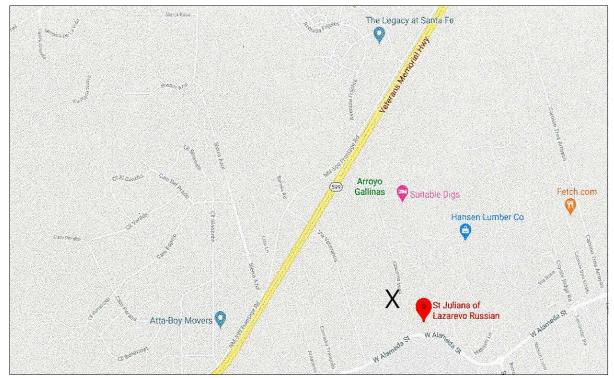


Lexstacy has recently been given her 60,000 mile servicing: new tires and brakes, a full alignment, a much needed GPS map update, oil change, fresh fluids, air conditioner recharged, and given a thorough wash 'n wax with interior detailing. She gleams. I had the Lexus dealer put on my new personalized PICKY license plate, too. She is eager

to take me on a rambling photo excursion on some of the gravel back roads between my home and Santa Fe proper that I've never explored. I have found everything from astonishing landscape views, to superb wall murals, to Dadaist junk assemblage on my earlier travels to Cerrillos, Madrid, Galisteo, Lamy, and other small towns rich in history.

I pack: a cucumber sandwich on RyKrisp, a ham and cheese on multigrain bread, an apple, a banana, a diet Dr, Pepper, a thermos of cold water, a bag of Kettle Sea Salt and Vinegar potato chips, my walking sticks, my hiking hat, a roll of toilet paper, a picnic blanket, and my serious-photography-only Sony digital camera with accessory bag of filters, lens cleaner, an extra SD-card, batteries. The dogs jump about, wanting to go on this

adventure, too, but get locked up inside their well-shaded El Camino Real astro-turf dog-run with snacks and a huge bowl of water to keep them happy.



Map showing St. Juliana of Lazarevo's Russian Orthodox Church and X-spot where I took a photograph of a truck cum sculpture.

While taking a short-cut to the congested Cerrillos Road shopping centers that are due south of my place, I pass a curious site. A structure with a blue onion dome sticking up over the trees that obscure the building itself. It looks like a huge Christmas tree ornament. I called Flo the next day and inquired about it; she told me it is St. Juliana of Lazarevo Russian Orthodox Church. Stunning inside, she said. But, today, I want to explore the area around that unusual ornament in the desert. Gravel roads leading to *where*?

I key up Lexstacy and nudge her out of her stall, driving up hill, then down, exiting right onto Frontage Road, driving south until I get to the underpass of I-599 where I turn left on Abajo, go straight to W. Alameda Street, turn left again, drive until I spy thet stunning blue onion dome of St. Juliana's, turn left on a gravel road, Chicoma Vista, the church's entrance road, but drive past the colorful onion. I delight in the crunching sound of new tires on small stones. I imagine myself in an old horse-drawn carriage as I slowly roll up to a dead end. A dead end spatially, but not aesthetically.

Before me sits a most interesting assemblage of diverse fragments: an old weatherbeaten truck on blocks, doors decorated with images of flowers, parts of the vehicle painted a green that plays against its rusty red hue, headlights smashed into empty eye sockets; resting on its flat hood are picturesque rocks and old animal skulls. Small plants grow about it as if honoring its graveyard-like presence, What fascinates me is not only the "Outsider

Art" aspect of this installation — it is part Dada, part Surreal — but the accumulated sense of history this object, a metal corpse, suggests. A story lurks here. Who owned it? What sort of loads did this truck haul? For what purpose? Was the owner Mexican or Indigenous? Have a family? If so, what family dynamics played out between them? Did this truck now function as funky memorial to someone? There are so many roadsides memorials in New Mexico. It would make a good writing assignment for MFA students to create a short story based on the aesthetic evidence of this abandoned, but beautified, object. I'd have the students "reverse engineer" this mechanical memorial, imagining its history back to its production and sale, its owner and use, the role it played in various human lives.

I begin to photograph this utility-vehicle-now-Southwestern *memento mori*. Shoot many images from various POV, the best of which you see below.



Found Assemblage, off W. Alameda St., near St. Juliana of Lazarevo Russian Orthodox Church, Santa Fe, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.

Exhausted from the shoot — its getting intensely hot — I spread my picnic blanket and layout my spread, gobbling lunch with *mucho gusto*. My spirit has been restored.

* :

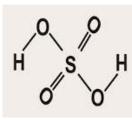


My Behavior In The Video Is Appalling'; Tech CEO Michael... Silicon Valley tech CEO Michael Lofthouse issued an apology late Tuesday for his behavoir captured on a viral video delivering vulgar and racist comments toward an ... Broadhead to the Head or Go To The Head of the Ass (2020) Picky Hunting's critical response to CEO Michael Lofthouse's unlofty racist remarks. She imagines him with a cigarette and a croissant in hand.

"Goooood Mooorning America!" announces the TV news. It should be "good mourning." We are all mourning the embarrassment the Asian family felt after being verbally attacked by another Babooninspired racist. His own mother describes him as "having an alcohol problem" and "having always been a loose cannon." Although described as a "CEO" in the press, this tech whiz's biz has only about 2 employees. The lock-down has



A broadhead arrow tip.



Sulphuric acid formula.

the-head option.

time. An immigrant himself, he has the alpha male effrontery to attack people he assumes are either visiting or are recent residents. Noonie's sister married an Asian. My son married an Asian. I couldn't be more offended by this shitbag. I feel compelled to "hack" his image on an online posting about this egregious behavior. Noonie, an expert with bow and

quashed his chances of affording a red Tesla Model 3 for some

about this egregious behavior. Noonie, an expert with bow and arrow since a teenager, always said the most awful way to die would be a "broadhead to the head." Ergo, my graffiti-revenge imagines such. Too lenient, I think. Being the woman I am, I'd force the guy to suck on a sulphuric acid popsicle until he lost all ability to speak. The difference, Agatha Christie might say, lies between 2 types of gender-based revenge: the former, surely male; the latter, quite female. For graphic purposes, I choose the arrow-to-

I stare at this monster's face, but it isn't a monster. No, I see typical Millennial overconfidence looking at me, wanting to impress, a sense of young success, a vision of future adventures. I go into a weird reverie about this guy-become-icon-of-hatred:

Had I been younger, hunting a mate, and saw this guy's visage on a dating site, I might bite. I can see it now. We'd meet at an astonishingly mediocre all-you-can-eat sushi bar, which he would suggest. Its cocktails would be cheap, offer no chopsticks, only tiny forks, and whose wait staff are all blonde girls. That day a back room would be full of old folks from a nearby condo complex fully focused on their Bingo sheets.

We would stand face-to-face. He would lift his hand and spread his fingers in a gesture of greeting imitating Spock's on "Star Trek" but would say: "Longevity and recursion." I would just nod my head. "Call me Mikey," he'd reply. We'd shake hands —

obviously pre-COVID — his palm would be sweaty, his flesh look more like living flesh than real flesh, and his "doo" would speak worlds about his will to impress, yet reveal his innate conformity to norms, topped with a coating of rebelliousness. Not of my world. I'd halfsmile back at his too-perfect, insincere, smile and observe about his haircut, "Nice turban, Mr. Urbane." At which he'd reply, "My salon calls it the 'Kenny-Cut'; they offer clients a special liqueur, 'Kenny Buck Port', while awaiting service. . . . Thanks for answering my post, for coming today." He would then wink.

We would be led to our table near that Bingo room by a young blonde, a clone of Trump's White House Press Secretary. Once seated, Mikey's language would pour into my ears too fast for the sound to go fully down my eustachian tube. Words would bubble around my ears, burst, and drip down the side of my face. It's all about his accomplishments: from karate to karaoke, from recumbent bike up the coast to monocyling across the country, from gorging down 75 Nathan's Famous Hotdogs in 5 minutes to eating chocolate-covered crickets washed down with diluted methanol shots, from bungee jumping to sky-diving, from opening an offshore account in the Caymans to winning big in Vegas, from stealing an algorithm from an Asian competitor to firing an employee whose name went from Phil to Philomena after a lengthy spell of gender-altering surgeries that severely challenged his company's modest health plan, from his planned houseboat renovation in Marin County to his dream of blasting into outer space courtesy of Elon Musk. On and on. I would not get a word in edgewise. I would be reduced to holding my saketini with both hands until I was afraid I would never be able to release them.

I would've wanted to leave pronto, reading the sterility of mind in his eyes for many minutes, but I'd be too hungry to flee free food, grabbing my left pinky (all I could free from my cocktail glass) and licking my lips in anticipation of the Hawaiian Poke Bowl I would've just ordered. Seeing my bored expression, he'd eventually adjust his pace of conversation, making long pauses between very measured and calculated words that would gurgle down into my ear and into my increasingly resistant brain.



Derp Sketch.

After his 2nd saketini, several inopportune facial ticks would punctuate his sentences: Outer Brow Raiser, Cheek Puffer, Lower Lip Depressor. After about 15 minutes of this, I would be tempted to give him Picky's Infamous Derp Face Libido Killer Response (PIDFLKR). Make him imagine he's sitting across from his future Girl Pop, nail-polished 12-year old autistic daughter by a woman who by then would be his ex-wife. But he'd be spared that comic version of the Medusa stare when his top-of-the-line iPhone's ring tone — Alfred Newman's rousing music for the film How the West was Won — would interrupt.

"Yes!" He'd almost scream into the phone. I would hear a very excited female voice on the other end of the call saying something about "a mile long," to which Mikey would ask "Aren't you at the meeting?" Eventually, he would yell back at his assistant, flipping

his middle finger in the air at no one in particular: "Jeesus, Claire, if they snooze on this, it's their fuckin' loss! They should be grateful I've been playin' ball with them this long."

This would be where he would end the distressing call, pausing for a sec to mutter "Pretentious bastards!" under his breath before downing his 3^{rd} saketini in one huge gulp, while staring at me — no, through me — as if I didn't exist. It was as if he was seeing in his mind's eye hounds gnawing bloody bones. He would quickly regain his composure, probably intuiting I was "reading him" too closely, mapping him cognitively and emotionally (my psychoanalytic training cutting in here). Our conversation would never get going again. I would already be as dissolving vapor, disappearing into the void, as a loud voice from the Bingo room close by, the Official Bingo Caller's, would announce: "Ladies and gentlemen, now pay attention. . . . $H5 \dots N1$."

Now wasn't *that* fun, folks? Well, not the H5N1virus reference. But it was cathartic for me. Bingo!

Bingo Etiquette



Here are a few bingo tips sent by our H.O.A. Events Coordinator to residents wanting to participate in Bingo Friday (now indefinitely canceled) that will help you feel like a veteran player:

- Come early to grab a lucky seat and sit close to the caller.
- When the action starts up, please quiet down so you won't disturb other players.

— Bingo players pride themselves on being prepared, so make sure to have a few daubers and have your lucky charm ready before you start.

— If you're the lucky winner, make sure to pay attention and speak up when you get bingo! Nobody

wants to "sleep through a bingo."



Godzilla destroys the freighter the Bingo Maru (movie).

But Bingo isn't all fun. It can be freighted with danger as in the Japanese classic *Godzilla* (1954).

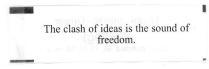
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14.0



New Mexico's record heat wave continues. Even worse in Arizona where people are lining up at 1 a.m. in cars to be tested for the coronavirus. Many of these people are low income, no health insurance, or abundant food for hungry children thanks to the GOP, who is going in circles during this crisis, doing little to ameliorate misery. In Arizona, Republican Governor Doug Ducey plays acey-deucey with his citizens' lives. Florida cases spike, the

highest number of daily COVID cases yet. ICUs in many states are running out of beds; meanwhile, the Immanent Baboon plays golf and claims everything is beautiful. This morning, his ratings are at an all-time low. Cancel Culture's popularity is on the rise. The country is in upheaval during these "unpresidented" times.



Yes, as my Lu Lu's fortune cookie last night announced, a clash of discourses is healthy, but if rifts become deep enough and compromise is no option, violence may erupt, like in our Civil War. We seem

close to that kind of split in our nation now. Noonie had predicted that in 50 years — if our political lives didn't deteriorate into bitter internecine wars the Balkans suffered — we'd become The Divided States of America. He'd be amazed how his prediction is being accelerated now due to our current crisis. Noonie wrote in his Moleskin notebook:

Red and Blue states would each have a national government, i.e., two national governments would be empowered. State borders patrols would demand passports and visas to travel between New Mexico to Arizona to Texas. Border incidents would be common. Underground railroads would be established to assist LGBTQ and others, like liberal academics, to flee Red states. State National Guards would be heavily funded to protect their respective borders. Walls would go up. Drones would be deployed. Incidents of hostile flyovers would skyrocket.



An ad on KOAT's Morning News catches my attention. I rush to my office computer to check it out. I do my research. I find that Hinge is a dating app founded by Justin McLeod in 2012. It is more relationship-oriented in its features compared to its competitors, with marketing efforts focusing on the app's "designed to be deleted" branding. In 2017, Hinge



received the most mentions compared to other dating apps in the Weddings section of *The New York Times*. *Wow*!

The company released Hinge Matchmaker in September 2017 to reinvent online dating for "people that missed out on the dating app craze."

That's me, for sure!

Profiles on Hinge are composed of pictures as well as 3 self-selected personal prompts. The prompts encourage users to focus on personality traits rather than just photos.

Nice.

When using Hinge, users are presented with

other profiles in a vertical timeline format. Instead of swiping, users have to respond to specific photos or prompts when liking a profile. Hinge allows users to filter matches based on traits that are most important to them, such as religion or height. Unlike other dating apps, users can message other users without having to 1st "match".

I like that!

In July 2018, Hinge rolled out its "most compatible" feature, which utilizes the Gale–Shapley algorithm — *anything to keep me shapely!* — to find the best matches for users. Once per day, users get a match that makes the best pairing based on user liking and passing activity.

Okay.



The Hingie piñata ad promotion. We've all become Trump's piñata, now. It hurts.

Hinge's marketing focuses on how the app is "designed to be deleted," with its cute fluffy mascot, Hingie, getting roasted in a campfire, encased in ice in a freezer, run over by a cab, flattened by an air-conditioner, shaped into a piñata, and so forth, when 2 Hinge users fall in love. In 2020, the app launched Hingie Shop, selling products that are meant to be "destroyed" in use by new lovers, such as bath bombs and smores.

Smores!!! I can't resist 'em. I like 'em as much as I like the Smurfs. (There's a story behind this.)



in the garden. Anything else could get a bit complicated. Mars, now in active Aries, calls for action and stirs our impatience. And our brains can feel stuck in honey as mental Mercury appears to hold still as it turns direct after three weeks retrograde.

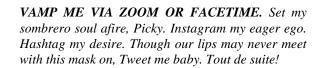
Mars creates a pool of emotional fuel while it lingers in Aries over the next six months. Like a can of psychic gasoline, it can fuel our engines, but we can still feel as lazy as a cat in sunshine between efforts. Mars in Aries lowers our impulse control and shortens our patience. If any situation becomes volatile, get out of there and let the air clear. Maybe I should try this app. But I need more guidance. My Friday edition of *Pasatiempo Magazine* is out. I look forward to 2 sections, The Art Reviews and Heather Roan Robbins' "Star Codes" astrology readings.

In the former, photographer Frank Blazquez's show of color portraits at The Ruppe community gallery details how distinctive Hispanic tattoos are here,

often featuring elements of "geographic pride" in New Mexico and its history. Having also lived in Chicago, he compares Hispanic tats there versus here: "[Y]ou don't see people with 'Illinois' all over their face and cheeks." Next, I jump to the astrology section for my love-life guidance: *Mars, now in active Aries, calls for action*... *Like a can of psychic gasoline, it can fuel our engines.* Okay! Everything hinges on a good forecast, and I've got it now.

I download the Hinge app, launch my profile into the Cloud. I'm not eager to use OurTime, as 1 guy shot a bizarre message my way:







Ugh! I write him back a polite refusal, but add that he might like my *younger* sister, Betty, better. I attach this jpeg of some TV personality and give him the e-mail address of my friend Vita — she'd laughingly approves, excited, wanting to "mess with that guy's mind as a continuing conceptual art piece." I picture the 2 of them *finally* meeting, eating lunch outdoors at the Counter Culture Cafe. I can't stop chuckling at the imagined moment: it would be akin to the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on 2 socially-distanced tables.

More choice OurTime postings (sans photos) for your entertainment:

MY CARRIER PIGEON brings a message to free your quarantined heart, instructions for e-mailing, zooms peeks, and for meeting under the moon postlockdown. — I'm a ventriloquist on a ventriloquist, a jolly male seeking a fetching female who likes birds.

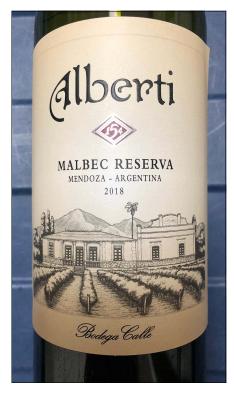
I'M SEEKING ANTIBODY WITH A WIDE SMILE AND A LOVE OF BOOKS. How shameful to be antigen. How thankless — like a Shrew. Trick your Host the livelong day into reproducing YOU! Enclose your most prurient poem, 'cause the porn wars are over, porn won. — Poet-Tree lover, Old Town, Albuquerque.

TONY FAUCI SEEKS DEBORAH BIRX. Public health wonk and taichi master seeks earthy Jewish woman for sniggering about Governor Lujan Grisham after work with our masks off. Long walks along the Santa Fe river, adding money to expired parking meters. — Divorced Off-the-Beaten-Track Guy.

HITCH MY WAGON TO A STAR. Looking for a bright, sophisticated, sardonic senior stargazer seeking refuge from her coterie of sycophants. I'm a good listener when my hearing aid is in place. — Widower Margrave lolling on one of two chaise longues on his Tesuque ranch.

You can see why I'm switching online dating services. And treating myself to a what I call in Jungian terms an Anima-Animus Lunch: superb soft, feminine French cheese (Lincet's Brillat-Savarin Affine) washed down with a very hearty, masculine Argentinian red wine (Alberti Malbec). Noonie would've just ruined this repast by spreading the cheese on an Original Triscuit cracker. Nostalgic, I keep a Triscuit box in my cupboard.





* *



A new day. Am I stoned this morning? My head reels, I am unsteady on my feet. But I am not laughing. Probably dehydrated. Or is it the bad news? Two Faces has pardoned that most disgusting, Nixon-tattooed geek, Roger Stone! Each day's news features a new travesty and tragedy. I sip coffee, do a riff on the 15 stanzas

of the Seder song, Dayenu:

- The Immanent Baboon's election. That would've sufficed to disgust us. - The Baboon's complicity with Putin. That would've sufficed to disgust us. - The Baboon's lauding of Kim Jong-un. That would've sufficed to disgust us. - The Baboon's border wall. That would've sufficed to disgust us. - The Baboon's locking up immigrant families. That would've sufficed to disgust us. — The Baboon's mocking of a handicapped man. That would've sufficed to disgust us. - The Baboon's misspelling of "unprecedented" as "unpresidented." That would've sufficed to disgust us. - The Baboon's firing of competent staff with consciences. That would've sufficed to disgust us. — The Baboon's handling of the epidemic. That would've sufficed to disgust us. — The Baboon's cutting of health coverage. That would've sufficed to disgust us. - The Baboon's push to unsafely open schools during the epidemic. That would've sufficed to disgust us. — The Baboon's giving the rich tax breaks. That would've sufficed to disgust us. - The Baboon's overuse of "beautiful" and "huge." That would've sufficed to disgust us. - The Baboon's lack of geographical knowledge. That would've sufficed to disgust us. — The Baboon's vitriolic attacks on opponents. That would've sufficed to disgust us.



Senator "Trump Clone" Pirtie.

Yes, each day some new horror to disgust us. Is it a coincidence that our classical radio station is playing "The Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves" from Verdi's *Nabucco*? Verdi wanted audiences to see the opera's theme of Jewish oppression as reflecting on the political situation in Italy at the time. I make an additional connection now to both the Reign of COVID XIX and that of the Immanent Baboon.

Today's Sunday edition of *Santa Fe New Mexican* shows on the front page Roswell Republican Senator Cliff Purtie, lookin' pretty purty *sans* mask on the Senate floor, openly defying state law to wear a mask. A farmer by trade, trading commonsense for clownmanship. These political clowns

like Pirtie should be locked up, given a year's prison term for LUII, i.e., legislating under the influence idiocy. Hey! He looks like he could be Michael Lofthouse's older brother, doesn't he? What's this shitbag's early story? One can fantasize: someone gave him an Ayn Rand book for his 15th birthday; his Born Again Christian aunt caught him masturbating in the family barn, a John Deere catalogue in hand; abducted by aliens landing in Roswell, brain-washed and released; or maybe *he* is an alien? He's certainly alien to human feeling.

Ah, stories! I am never more covetous than when someone tells me a story, a secret. Why I went from literature into psychoanalytic training. Why people, even on the street, stop me to tell me their story. They can *smell* it, my desire to listen. I can't escape them, even if I wanted to, but I don't. *Ever since my miscarriage* ... *I think my daughter is on the autistic spectrum* ... *My husband invites his secretary to dine with our family every Friday* ... *I keep finding* Soldier of Fortune *magazine hidden under my teenage son's bed mattress* ... *My law enforcement husband is, I think, molesting our daughter* ... *I suspect my cop dad is doing more with his knee than kneeling at church on Sunday* ... *My academic husband actually believes his departmental chairman is out to kill him, and I don't mean just professionally* ... *My sister has designs on my husband; literally, she's a tattoo artist, isn't that a bit strange though* ...

I am a story sponge. Stories about lovely, but lonely, pro-feminist, kale-eating men with advanced degrees in the Humanities (why I was attracted to Noonie); my patients "rape fantasies" romances; patients whose analyses peak when their stories turn into self-disclosure or narcissistic display; stories about people who resolve to sleep for an entire year in order to dodge their tic for obscenity; stories about women whose husbands only want to play poker in their man-cave with their alcoholic buddies; stories about parents who turn their children into creative neurotics (I think Noonie, here), or much worse, into sociopaths (looking forward to reading Mary Trump's exposé). Even stories like *my* story. I must make a version of myself and inhabit that. So let me move on.

As soon as I desire, I am not merely here and now, but somewhere else and for something else. Somewhere else. Like somewhere else where the Republican Party is not a wholly owned subsidiary of Trump Entertainment Resorts, Inc. Something else, not a semi-democracy overseen by the Immanent Baboon and his zookeepers. The concept has utopian aspirations. Aspirations which many of us seek, but our castles in the air crumble to find us behind a costume jewelry counter at Macy's, a bored barista at Starbucks, an underpaid member of the academic precariat, or an unemployed restaurant worker. Today, even the dreams of immigrant "Dreamers" are being gnawed away at by the Baboon.

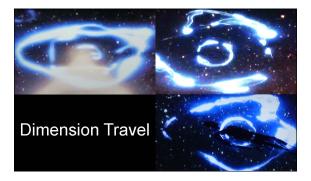


As an undergrad, a Lit prof of mine asked our "Selected Readings in Utopia/ Dystopia" class to speculate on why so little future envisionments had been authored by African Americans (this was prior to Sun Ra and his notion of Afrofuturism). I raised my hand; speculated that a community needed a firm rooting in their past, which had been largely rubbed out, in order to project

toward an imagined future; that the Black community was only then just starting to mine their past (this was prior to *Roots*). That violent past and its continuation in the present was succinctly described by activist Stokely Carmichael, who coined the term "Black Power": "I was born in jail," he said when, upon returning to the USA from Europe and Cuba in 1967, he was asked if he feared being incarcerated here. In Harlem at that time a reply to "How are you? might be met with "Oh man, I'm *nowhere*! Later, Sun Ra joyously reaches poetically futureward, blasting off from that sad reply: *Yes, out of nowhere they come / from the no point*. . . . Out in outer space on the tip of the worlds.

Noonie, who had a student intern working at the Experimental Sound Studio in Chicago, was given full access to their extensive Sun Ra music archive, The Sun Ra/El Saturn Collection of approximately 600 tapes dating from the 1950s - 1993: rehearsal tapes, recordings of live concerts, home recordings of sketches and experiments, and master tapes of material likely intended for commercial release. A number of tapes include lectures and recitations by Ra of original unpublished texts, which offer rare insight into his unique arcane philosophy of Afrofuturism.

It was catnip to Noonie. Over summer vacation, he'd disappear for days. His early hearing loss might be attributed to his numerous auditory sessions, slumped in a leather chair at the sound studio with big headphones strapped on, a triscuit box in his lap, a Diet Vernors on the desk before him. He called it his "A Triscuit-a-Task-it Time." It enriched his



interest in other worlds, parallel universes; dimension-travel, places he could, as he put it, "Escape from the horrible here and now." And this was pre-Trump!

I know that realistically the closest I can get to somewhere else is *right here* in my "June home" (Noonie and I and our 2 best buds all have June

birthdays within a few days of each other). Had I remained in Oak Park, Illinois, my situation would be dimmer during these troubling days. In New Mexico, nature snaps me awake, *vitaminizes* my spirit, speaks to me in ways not available in my former life. When it rains, water quickly goes to the sun, only to return weeping — again and again. Strolling through my little community, which keenly articulates the landscape with many types of rocks and large stones, hiking in the mountains, or just driving past stunning rock formations on the way to Bandelier Monument I see that rocks are the primary configuration in this landscape, one sees rock *faces*. Rocks are the spirit of the region. I grok Sun Ra's saying that, "the stones speak . . . through vibrations of beauty."



Rock-solid advice, sculpture seen along Canyon Rd., Santa Fe, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.

* *



It's been many weeks since my cleaning lady and her daughter have swooshed through my house with their vacuums, brooms, and cloths. Yet I still pay them their monthly wages. Smell of dust in the geometry. Dirt collects in corners; ants, and other bugs tour my abode despite me letting loose my new iRobot Roomba 960 cleaner. A grounded flying saucer, "Robbie" zips about defined areas, bumping into chair legs, backing off, reattacking the territory. My dogs go crazy. Yet Robbie still misses much. I have to keep ordering him, "Try again." While Robbie is licking my bedroom carpet, getting

stuck among my "realia" — a pastel-colored night gown, a pair of cream wool cable-knit socks, old slippers — I log on to The Santa Fe Bulletin Board to quickly vacuum up the day's latest local "dirt". Today's top posting is:

SEVERED HEAD SEEN FLOATING DOWNRIVER. A scene of mauve, green, blue. Anyone missing a relative?

This, the very same day Fahim Saleh, co-founder of 2 international ride-share startups, was decapitated and dismembered in his Manhattan apartment! A head roll of the comic dice? Here, 4 days ago, this shocking news was topping the SFBB listings:

ANYONE ON THE SOUTH SIDE, BE SAFE! Shooting at the bluffs, shooter still hasn't been detained, they're searching in close neighborhoods. Keep hidden.

An iPhone video of zipping police cruisers, flashing lights, and sirens dramatized the post. I imagine a squad of CSI Super Roombas 2000 scouring the crime scene, caroming about, sweeping up material evidence.



Kiva fireplace where the owl got trapped.

As a member, I think about posting on SFBB about the BIG OWL INCIDENT. Yesterday, an owl (British poet Ted Hughes called owls "the bird with the sewn-up face") flies down my outdoor kiva's chimney. I take off the fire guard. No matter how much the dogs bark at the opening, it refuses to fly out. I shoo the dogs away, hoping the bird will fly out. Nothing. I run to the kitchen, grab my huge, yellow rubber oven mitts and extract the menacing bird by hand, tossing it into the air. It flies off like a WWII fighter plane taking off a carrier deck. I am sure if I posted about this I'd get at least a dozen concerned, albeit wacky, responses on what to do in the future if this happens again:

- Spray Elon Musk in the air near the kiva's opening; owls can't hate the odor.
- Keep a low coal fire in your kiva year round.
- Got a .410 shotgun?
- Burn incense close to the opening and wait.
- Toss a used face mask into the opening and wait.
- Keep rolling dice into the opening. Odds will be in your favor.
- The owl spirit animal usually symbolizes death, but it can also mean a great change will come into your life. Owls represent transition, in other words, and will guide you during difficult times in your life. Rejoice!

When I tell my acquaintance, Flo, of my owl adventure, about posting it on SFBB, she replies: "Do it! Some respondents might be *single men* speaking with moonlight in their voices, offering you help; for example something like: 'Picky, Picky, if you just *call* me [phone number] when this happens again. Let my tender hands grab the owl and . . .'

I disagree. No compulsory inner music here prompts me. No stones speak to me of casting this lure into the waters. She's disappointed. "You need to give equal democratic weight to all opportunities," she sternly lectures me over the phone. An hour later she sends me this bizarre jpeg by e-mail with an odd typo, or is it? If not a typo, I need to "take" what?



Flo Rivers' comic balloon jpeg sent by e-mail. I didn't know she had the Photoshop skills to do this.

There are days when I'm so bored and lonely, I might "take" her advice and do just that. Trot around a tree. I have a small mirror with a short handle. Perfect for the ritual. The ritual of breath on a mirror denoting the presence of life.

But my friend Mel, her 2 feet planted more solidly on the ground than Abe and Flo, would agree with my reluctance to cast this lure into unknown waters. I can hear her advice: "Trust your picky fishing instincts, Picky, like you taught Noonie at your favorite Wisconsin fishing resort fishing for lunker Walleyes. You have to accurately control your cast, right? Or it's a lure caught in the weeds, line tangled on a tree. At least try, sweetie. Or your *Picky In Love*'s casting call might bring in a cast of real characters: The Blue Demon, a retired *lucha libre* wrestler sporting an Ape Sex T-shirt, suffering a bad back; a failed Santa Fe sculptor named Hopey Glass; the dyslexic leader of the defunct punk band Ooot of Gas; or bottom line, maybe an *unreal* character, a malevolent chatbot!"

Bots. I don't think H.G. Wells predicted such AI technology. Just about everything else, though. In 1 of British academic David Lodge's funny "campus novels," he features a character addicted to doing a Q and A with a chatbot therapist. In 2012, Lodge wrote a novel about the eclectic autodidact H.G. Wells titled *A Man of Parts*. That title perfectly describes Noonie, who loved Wells' sci-fi and shared with Wells an infinite capacity for being interested. Today, extrapolating from his negative comments on Napoleon, H.G. would certainly see the Immanent Baboon as "a thing like the bacterium of some pestilence." In his writings on history, where he favors a "Federal World State,"he addresses the horror of the Black Death: "a pestilence of unheard of virulence. . . . Never was there so clear a warning to mankind to seek knowledge and cease bickering, to unite against the dark powers of nature. . . . [But the wealthy] were too ignorant of economic laws to understand that they must not press upon the toilers in this time of general distress."

Observations, unfortunately, still relevant today when science is being undermined



Anti-science protesters.

by sheer ignorance, herdthink, or politically-motivated reasons.

But Wells had his faults. His crass description of the millions of victims of the 1919 - 1919 flu epidemic as "old people, weak people, feeble children who had to die somehow," could've come from the mouth of Trump.

What emoji would one attach to *that* statement?



Yes, it's the 7th Annual World Emoji Day. When Shigetaka Kurita created the 1st emoji in 1999, he had to work within a grid only measuring 12 x 12 pixels. How am I going to celebrate, re-



cognize the ubiquity of this cute visual shorthand for human emotion? Give the dogs Nilla Wafer Cookies as a treat? Look in my mirror for inspiration? Bad choice, as I only see this sad emoji, given our grim situation these days.

Portland mayor demands Trump remove federal agents from city People detained far from property agents were sent to protect Trump looking for a confrontation, says governor



Given Trump's sending Federal cops to Portland, Oregon to show he's "tough". As if confirming this mood of doom, another roll of the cosmic dice. I come across a dead

2

lizard on my dog walk this morning. The dogs took a sniff and backed off. It had gotten stuck in a small pool of melted tar



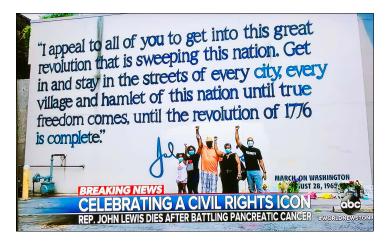
The dead lizard.

during the heat wave and now looks like an ancient fossil unearthed or a virally infected sperm. No LOL here.

* * *

15.0

John Lewis. A great man has passed. The very diametrical opposite in all respects of Trump. His message: Hope and Love. Sad, because I feel we needed his presence during these harsh times. When I think: *Alternative facts, fake news, "boundless capitalism" determining what is good, or worth attention. How long can you go on like this America. Are you becoming a monster?* I then focus on the hard fight Lewis fought all his life and get inspired.



I see my "plague year" journal as a practice of resistance attempting to grasp the magnitude of our restless, complex, variegated catastrophe. Were he here to proof it, Noonie might define my project as the result of "passionate analytical thinkfeeling." The key term here is *passionate*.

Noonie was less

passionate about life than I. A pessimist since exiting the womb, his experimental writing was informed by the sad belief in the extermination of our species, *extinction aesthetics*, what one thinker calls "the post-human *without survival*." I used to ridicule his "End of Days" obsession, but now . . .

I poked fun at him when he vehemently claimed Trump would win the election. Noonie, always the pessimist. During a "nail biter" Chicago Bulls basketball tournament game in the 1990s, Michael Jordan's team about to lose, he was adamant that the Bulls were doomed.

"Never will they win it. Never. No way." he said.

"No! Jordan will save the day!"

"No way!" Disgruntled, not wanting to see Jordan's disgrace, he got up from watching the game, was about to flee to his office, when at the last possible second Jordan sinks one from way down the court, the winning shot, winning that year's NBA series.

I go crazy, jumping up and down, tossing popcorn in the air. "See! I told you," I said, repeating it 12 times.

So you can understand that when Noonie warned me that "American-style fascism is just around the bend," I laughed.

"America's better than that," I declared, then tossed in his face Jordan's amazing saving dunk as proof of his persistent, wrongheaded negativity.

"You're naive, Picky," he warned, knitting his eyebrows.

"No, I'm not!" I almost screamed back. Some Jewish thing deep in me wants to believe in a better future.

But I am no longer laughing. No longer tossing popcorn in the air. Noonie *was* prescient. Hell, in the late1990s, he proposed the perfect variation on his favorite cocktail, the vodka gimlet, for the grim times ahead:

THE VODKA GRIMLET: 3 parts vodka, 1 part fresh lime juice, ¹/₂ part simple syrup, ¹/₂ part grape Flavor Aid (Jonestown's preferred brand of Kool-aid); add ICE, shake like an L.A. earthquake. Pour into 5 glasses, arranged in a quincunx pattern served on a quincunx patterned wooden tray.



Noonie's quincunxial drink tray.

Notice that the sum of the ingredients $(3 + 1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2})$ = 5) results in Noonie's favorite number, that his proposed presentation of the 5 cocktail glasses on a special quincunxial patterned wooden tray completes his rather dicey (as I thought at the time) concept. A comic roll of the dice on our home bar by an avid amateur bartender.

Back in the mid-1990s, Noonie came up with another bizarre cocktail. This was in reference to the

eye-catching, televised, 45 minute, slow, police chase of O. J. Simpson's white Bronco along L.A. freeways:

O. J.'S BRONCO: 2 parts sloe gin, 1 part grenadine, 1 part juice from a freshly knife-slashed orange, 1 part stale lemon juice from concentrate, stir, then add a tiny drop of Penzoil motor oil. Serve over crushed ice in a chilled white mug with a small red plastic picnic knife for a swizzle-stick. Important: make 2 mugs of this concoction, making them with conviction; toss out one of your concoctions over your left shoulder. Drink the other.

I told Noonie, he could do a gag bartender book of these kind of recipes. I mean the 9 -11 disaster would've been grim grist for his bartenderly touch: THE TWIN TOWERS cocktail! It's debut would have to be in the Fall, in a "dive" in The Windy City's West Loop. It would be served in 2 tall paired glasses. You come up with the ingredients. I can't.

I told him at the time, he should offer to work bars at First-Friday-of-the-Month art openings in Chicago's River North Gallery District, serving his gag cocktails to the haute clientele strolling in after work to schmooze 'n booze and maybe even look at the art. But he had a paranoid distaste for gallery owners and opening nighters. An opportunity lost, in my limited estimation.

*

*



If Noonie had lived, he might've come up with an apropos champagne-based cocktail to celebrate John Lewis's hardfought contribution to the human adventure. I can't. I just feel a deep loss. Sip a little Elderflower liqueur to soothe *moi*. Pet the dogs over and over.

Saturn at Opposition

Today is 7/20/2020. A month after what would've been Noonie's 73rd birthday. Good numbers according to Noonie. Saturn (7 rings) is now at opposition to earth, the closest to earth it can be. Earth is slotted in between the sun and Saturn. All is in good order in our solar system. Speaking of things cosmic, I almost forgot to look up my astrological advice for the day:

There is a place and time to be diplomatic, but today ain't it. You need to flex your muscles and take control [like of my bladder? In Japan, adult diapers now outsell baby diapers.]. All of this nice stuff is keeping people from arguing, but it's not helping get anything done. You need progress, get it by pushing your agenda.

Okay. I'm ready to face the day with confidence.

Sticking to the day's cosmic theme, our classical radio station is this very minute playing Gustave Holst's "Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age" (for the Romans, Saturn was a god of time). It is a melancholy piece, the opening slow and almost unsettling, until the music expands into a heavy march, a march toward the ultimate harvest, death. Holst knew ageing isn't upbeat. My body is not in good order. My parts not aligned.

According to legend, Saturn settled in Latium on the future site of Rome. His arrival was welcomed by the Roman god Janus, the two-faced deity, the god of the beginnings and

ends. Gemini, Roman twins and Noonie's astrological sign, is often imaged as 2-faced.

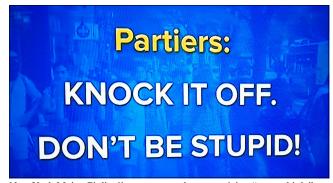


1940 Philco console radio.

Today is also the 51^{st} anniversary of the Moon Landing. When we were dating, Noonie told me, "I was on leave from the Air Force, vacationing at my 'Unca Don's' Pelican Lake cottage in Wisconsin, listening to the historical event over a 1940 Philco console radio — no TV in the cottage — the disparity between these intersecting technologies intrigued me." July 20th is also the birthday of Noonie's 1st serious girl friend, Mary Jo Mooney, who eventually became a psychotherapist. Noonie had this obsession with the number 20, since he was born on June 20th; the number 20 (5 + 5 + 5 + 5), or its translation into a quincunx array, was magical, figured the roll of the cosmic dice:



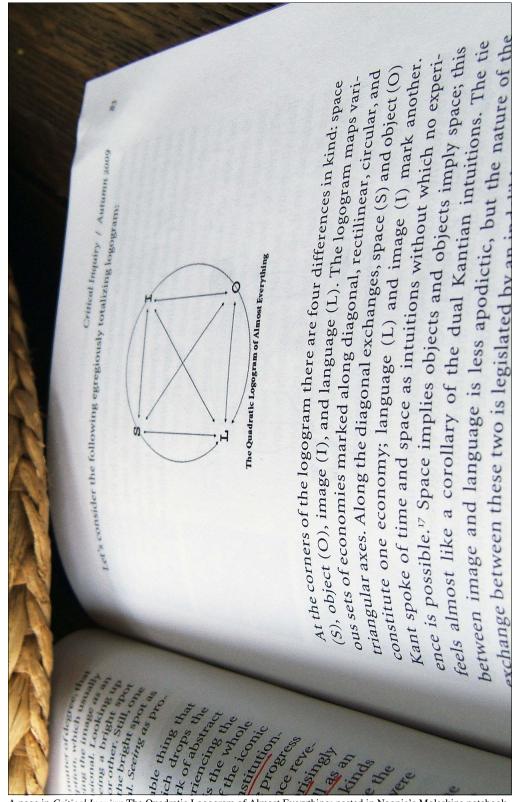
I take this information from Noonie's Moleskine notebooks. On each title page he rubber stamped **UNCOPYRIGHTABLE.** He told me it was the longest word in English to use each of its letters no more than once. In notebook #72015, on the initial page, he jots: "We are trading in our dithyrambs for algorithms." His 1st entry in that notebook is subtitled, "My writing, my whim." Therein, he admits "I write the way I do because no other writer seems to be writing the kind of book I want to read." He goes on to rail against popular culture as "repackaged nostalgia," going on to define his own creative reaction against it, as writing what he called "auto-affective transmissions of experiential data to whosoever can pick up the vibe." Sadly, not many people picked up his *vibe*, a term he parsed as "thinkership" (rather than readership), which meant "someone having patience to refuse immediate understanding and instantaneous comprehension." BTW, Noonie oft referred to his school's administration as practicing "wrongthink."



New York Major Giuliani's message to those practicing "wrongthink.".

In similar terms, this ongoing diary of mine — where I sometimes write, then cross out, statements like: "Today I was hoping to escape the bare language of fact." — could be defined Noonie-like as an on-thefly remix of whatever data I happen to glean from the networked narrative environment (i.e., TV, e-mails, various mes-

sage boards, chat rooms, newspapers, dating sites, gossip, etc.) at any moment in time. I



A page in Critical Inquiry: The Quadratic Logogram of Almost Everything; pasted in Noonie's Moleskine notebook.

sometimes use my own outputs as inputs (as Noonie did) in an ongoing process of metamaking. Ya grok?

My calculated project here, as you are witness of, is heating up with rage, fear, and love. An urgent call to, in some way, respond to all the madness about me. Like large groups of Millennials partying in the streets in defiance of commonsense and courtesy. Mayor Giuliani calling them out in no uncertain terms.

Speaking of dramatic, fearful physical events. Last night, around 6 p.m. I am watching Channel 7 News, when . . .



I abruptly bolt from my big, soft TV chair, screaming. The most violent thunder and lightning display to descend on our community since my arrival. The bolt feels like it hits outside right next to where I was siting. Dogs hysterical. Sky deepening into a red-orange haze that obscures the outside world completely. The End of Days? I frantic-dance about the room, collapsing at its center. My mind explodes in a fireworks of flashes from my past. Shuddering, I cuddle my dogs for comfort, no Noonie to cling to. I mouth monologues I won't remember. Sheets of violent rain ravage my roof for 20 minutes. My TV noisily buzzes national weather alert tones and flashes on-screen simulations of lightning. *Yah, yah, I get*



A series of frozen movements.

Grotowski's Polish "Poor Theater".

it! Duck and cover. Large hail. *Shut up!* The room fully illuminates with another flash-bang. I flash on the 1st explosion of the A-bomb set-off not far from here. Is a generalized catastrophe about to occur? The Immanent Baboon, shit, has he nuked Canada? Is the pandemic just a harbinger of E.L.E. (extinction-level event)? I run about the room in a panic. Imagine a scene from a radical "theater of the moment," which mixes dance and flash photography, such that with each strobe-flash my gestures freeze. Jeeze, it's could be an emotional scene from a play staged by Jerzy

Speaking of poor theater and experimental writing that defies explication, my Washington, D.C.-based son — retired from the State Department and burdened with a shit load of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA) — just sent via Facebook this experiment in political discourse by the Immanent Baboon:

"We have great agreements where when Biden and Obama used to bring killers out, they would say don't bring them back to our country, we don't want them. Well, we have to, we don't want them. They wouldn't take them. Now with us, they take them. Someday, I'll tell you why. Someday, I'll tell you why. But they take them and they take them very gladly. They used to bring them out and they wouldn't even let the airplanes land if they brought them back by airplanes. They wouldn't let the buses into their country. They said we don't want them. Said no, but they entered our country illegally and they're murderers, they're killers in some cases." Mensim

I unseat myself from my chair and I do a Noonie/Catholic 2-knee kneel before my computer — ignoring the fact I might not be able to get up — raise my hands in prayer and utter: "Hashem, give me the patience to refuse the temptation of immediate understanding and instantaneous comprehension in order to open myself toward genuine alterity." I wasn't exactly sure what I was asking, but it felt good. But Noonie might've defended this rant aesthetically as "the release of language from the communicative function" — poetry.

* *

This week I am devoting an hour a day to cleaning out my garage, stuffed with boxes from my move. I put on grungy clothes, steel-tipped boots, gloves, and go diving in. Several boxes I find are filled with more recent issues of Noonie's Moleskine notebooks. In one box, big surprise. A modest-sized POD artist book of his P=H=O=T=0==L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E (2013). The scripto-visual image on its back cover, in light of the Baboon's decision to send Federal Agents into our cities, seems quite prescient. When he initially, excitedly, shows me



Back cover to Noonie's scripto-visual artist book $P=H=O=T=0==L=A=N=G=U=A=\overline{G=E}$ (2013).

this book, I (and others, too) chide him over his dim view of future times. That damn pessimism of his! "Yah, right!" I chuckle. I am not laughing now. Noonie foresaw the gathering of the threatening clouds of American-style fascism years ahead of most folks.

For instance, in the mid-90s, he began to speculate about a fascist uprising in the



Noonie's Novel.

U.S. Set some 40 years in the future, his scripto-visual novel, *Tar Spackled Banner* (2014), describes the rise of "Coach Berzilius Windrip" (a Trumpian character) to President; the bloody civil war against his regime and his ugly base, the M&Ms (Maniacal Monoculturalists); their utter defeat by liberal forces and. ultimately. the utopic consequences: the creation in the Pacific Northwest and Northern California of an ecotopic territory named "Arboretum". For this glimpse into the near future, he invents a polyglot language (a mash-up of hacker jargon, "slango", Esperanto, Ebonics, Spanglish, etc.) spoken in the future. Wins an award, too.

On the last page of a notebook from 2017, Noonie lists "50 subdisciplines of theory today which end in the noun *Studies*":

Sport
Gaming
Sound
Visual culture
TV
Film
Periodical
Archive
Professionalization
Canonization
Subaltern
Debt
Technoscience
Food
Border
New American
Surveillance and Security
Cyborg
Disability
Leisure
Whiteness
Ethnic
Queer
Sexuality
Fashion

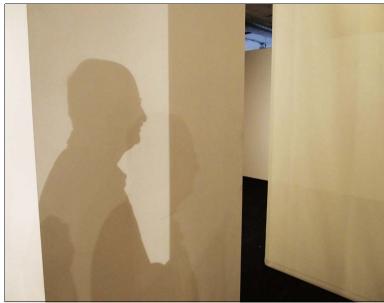
Below this list Noonie adds: "The reports of the death of theory have been greatly exaggerated." To this list, after living with him for over 20 years, I personally can now add "Noonie Studies," which nearly encompasses all of the above studies due to his voracious reading. I've "candled" his egghead, seen what's inside.

Perusing a bookstore or a library for the next book to devour, he would find what *seemed* to be his prize, but then, in what he called "The Knight's Move," focus on the book beside the book upshelf from the original selection. He'd grab it by the spine and, slightly bent over, dash quickly toward the cashier or library check-out desk, looking like Jon Heder's awkward run in the cult comedy film *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004), clutching his highschool textbooks.



Jon Heder as Napoleon Dynamite (*Napoleon Dynamite*).

Noonie still exists — no — his *shade* exists, particularly when I slowly peruse his Moleskine notebooks, delicately touching the paper surface with my fingertips as I read his thoughts.



Noonie's Shadow (2014) Lewis Koch.

Tonight, I go to bed in the dark — a power outage due to that severe storm, cascading failures from overloaded transmission lines — bitterly criticizing my unsteady legs. I biff my left toe on the bedpost. Laying on my back on my superbly soft, yet firm mattress, my toe aching, my shaken mind racing with weird speculations and memories: Had 2 sons, wanted a daughter, too, but if I had, she might've grown up to become a Fox News reporter — just to spite me — even become the Immanent Baboon's Press Secretary! . . . Prokofiev, Stalin, and my Russian-born great grandmother all died on the same day, had funerals on the same day — cosmic dice again.... When I was 5, I wrote a poem about a sad doily that was terribly lonely as it had no Happiness Birthday Cake cuddling on top of it... When I was 14 I wrote a short story, "The Land of Za" about the burgeoning love between a goy pizza delivery man and a shy, young, polio-crippled Jewess addicted to thick crust pizza and stuck in a small Chicago apartment with her older alcoholic sister after her parents were executed for treason. ... Will the large blue-eyed dragonfly that buzzed its wings a billion times a second as it hovered eye-to-eye with me in my garden remember me? ... My son with the shaven head, who once taught ESL to young Japanese kids in Fukuoka, made a fast round-trip bullet train ride between Tokyo and Kyoto, because "Mom, the cities' names are anagrams of each other," railing on that he "performed a conceptual art piece far outdoing any shit that crazy husband of yours ever did."

* *

I awake to clear skies, to a strong desire to drive an hour east through stunning landscape views to visit Las Vegas. Las Vegas, New Mexico, that is. Once a booming, bustling rail town, it is still home to many significant Victorian buildings, to the restored Plaza Hotel, and Montezuma Castle. The town's 1st synagogue still stands, now Catholic property. The Rough Rider and Chinese Immigrant Museum lures me, too.

Back in January. Our Newbies Now Club, munching on dill Havarti cubes and sipping white wine from tiny paper cups, discusses going to that historic town on the next club outing. The planning meeting, in La Fonda Hotel's conference room, is filled with the swift-moving noise of personalities. A female violinist plays softly as we sip Scotch (appropriate for me, as it tastes of old men). The lockdown will put a kibosh on our trip. His Evil Majesty COVID XIX absorbs, kills, all good.



A month later, a couple, perfectly matched, dove-like faces, avid motorcyclists — he drives, she rides — posted on our group's website how they communicate on their long rides via half-helmets equipped with a Bluetooth Intercom system. "Our members," the husband posts, "should all buy the same helmet (see attached jpeg) so that masked and helmeted, we can socially-distance and still easily talk amongst each other."

I reply, "It's a brilliant idea — IMPROVISE, ADAPT, OVERCOME — a Marine Corps slogan, I think." But from the flurry of responses, most of the gals are agin' it. Hairdo issues, some fear their hubbies would "want to get tattoos." The guys like it for a variety of reasons, but at heart, I think, they see it as an opportunity to mask their balding heads, even give them an excuse to buy that macho leather jacket beyond their retirement budget, but now stores are running big discounts A few dour members, mostly women, write in caps that it was terribly "DÉCLASSÉ," (one dissenter adding, "Having lived for a time in Northern Wisconsin, I've had it with 'Deplorables' on bikes roaring through small towns").

Some younger members go so far as to argue: "It's POLITICALLY INCORRECT!" Mary, a Green Party patriot who radiates the wholesomeness of someone who sells jam at farmers' markets as she promotes her "algal-centric slime" perspective, is a former Girl Scout troop leader and now leads the club's nature walks, adds to the counter arguments: "Helmets, like those described, block out the environment."



Mary: "Slime down people!"

I like Mary. I initially see her coming through the conference room door, pushing her hair back from her face. She is my kind of chubby, like a cloud in the sky. At our last meeting, I get her on the topic of romantic love; she tells me: "Love is chaos within the pattern of nature," reversing the usual chestnut. Responding to my gift for evoking intimacies from people, I learn she hails from Upper Michigan, "Soo-Saint-Mah-Ree," to be precise. Now divorced, she tells me, "My ex-husband, a Great Lakes male ogre, skippered a rusty salvage ship, *Ogre*, on the treacherous Lakes. When he'd come home, he'd drink, and I'd become, as I told friends, *the wreck of the Mary drear*. Soon, I was sleeping

under the radar in our backyard to avoid detection, sea shanty singing: Yo ho, yo ho, blow the man down, blow the man down. Give me some time to blow the man down."

From then on, "the axe for the frozen sea within us" (her words) is wielded and we exchange stories about our former abusive spouses. [Noonie always wondered: "If the plural of *mouse* is *mice*, why isn't *spice* the plural of *spouse*? Weren't spouses, Picky, to their respective spouses, part of the spice of life?"] Of course, I had to tell him — my inner-self stirred by emotional wind and radiation fluxes of memory — my 1st marriage "wasn't always spice 'n everything nice."

Me and Mary, Our Stories:

Me: a bruise.
Mary: a broken nose.
Me: a mug dropped.
Mary: a captain's telescope accurately thrown my way.
Me: fist meets door.
Mary: hiding in my tent during a summer storm.
Me: scène de sanglots.
Mary: little socializing as no one wanted to be around him.
Me: "His Pants" has to be cock of the roost — everywhere.
Mary: a drug addicted son, in and out of the hoosegow.
Me: confused kids.
Mary: Joining Green Peace. Reading Thomas Merton.
Me: starting a garden green assisted by Garden Green yard service.
Mary: Deciding to come out as a lesbian.

Mary and I share what has happened *to us.* I can't agree with Thoreau when he writes in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack River*: "Some, *poor in spirit*, record plaintively only what has happened to them; but others how they have happened to the universe [my emphasis]." It smacks of sexism. For — oh, poor women! — our lives under patriarchy *is* a sad plaintive record of what has happened to us. Male privilege, male ego, permits them to think about how *they* happened to the universe. Passivity versus agency.



Senator Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

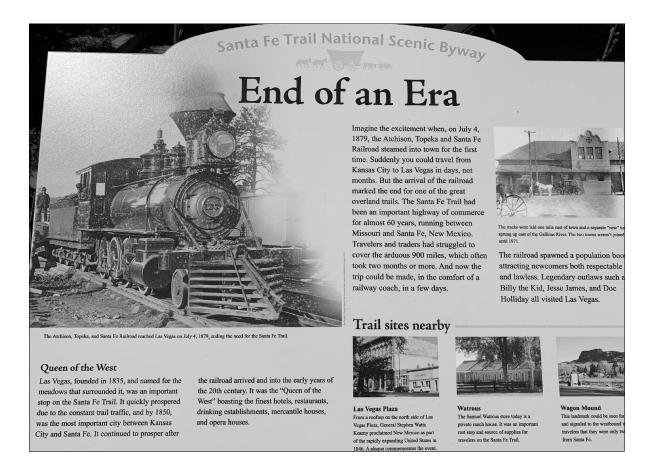
I should tweet this critical insight of mine to Vita — get her reaction — and thank her for sending me artist/author Chris Krauss' psychological fiction novel *I Love Dick* (1997). She told me "that book is a barely-fictionalized account of a woman's one-sided extramarital infatuation, It was, Picky, criticized as contemptible gossip in some corners of the art world."

Speaking of contemptible. The moment to act is optimal as Vita'll be really charged up (as I am) after watching Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) blow

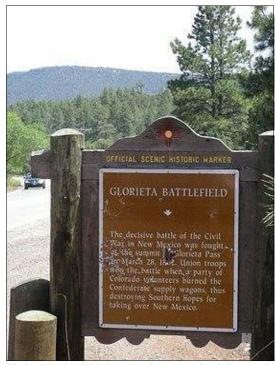
the man down, call out Republican Senator Ted Yoho (hence, "yoho" will be the new synonym for *conservative, sexist asshole*: "You fuckin' yoho!"). *Yo ho, yo ho, blow the man down!* I know, I know, she'll love my tweet. So I tweet her. I also mention my jaunt to Las Vegas. I end my missive with: "I hope you have a good rest of your day."

She thanks me for calling out Thoreau, adds, "May your day not end in clouds, wind, and cold — monsoon season, remember Picky. BTW, check out Glorieta Pass, girl."

I quickly pack for my solo Las Vegas sojourn. Best to leave early, avoid the 6 p.m. rain storm. I am taking my better digital camera. The dogs will stay locked up in my small laundry room, dubbed "The Mutt Hole". I have two masks, non-methanol-containing hand wash, sterile wipes, blue gloves. Lexstacy is eager to go see the old Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad station. Park near the Castanada Hotel, the Plaza Hotel, and antique shops.



The highway to Las Vegas is nearly deserted. I am doing the speed limit, 75 m.p.h, but cars and trucks are passing me like I'm standing still. No speed enforcement. I stay in the right lane and toodle along, watching the tops of gorgeous buttes on my right zig-zag up and down, up and down, as I make my exit to Glorieta Pass, where in March 1862 the Battle of Glorieta Pass took place, a decisive moment in the New Mexico Campaign of the American Civil War. The victory by the Union Army (primarily in the form of the Colorado



Glorieta Pass Battle Marker. "Borders are not simply lines marking territory; they are the product of, and produce, social relations from which we must emancipate ourselves" (Harsha Walia).

Militia) prevented the breakout of the Confederate Army forces onto the High Plains on the east side of Sangre de Cristo Mountains, halting the intended Confederate advance northward along the base of the Rocky Mountains whose goal was to take the lucrative gold and silver mines there out of Union hands.

"We New Mexicans stopped those 'yoho' racist bastards once," Vita tweets. "We can do it now, at the poles!" I see why she wanted me to make a slight detour on my way to my final destination. I pull over for a snap of the historical marker. Imagine the yells, screams, explosions, smoke that covered the bloody area over a century ago. Blue and Gray; now it's Blue and Red. COVID XIX is taking lives as fast as the Civil War did.



Train station, Las Vegas, NM. The trains accelerated the influx of white settlers.

Including my detour, it takes me just over an hour to get to the Las Vegas train depot. An architecturally pleasing structure, rich with history. No one in the parking lot. Inside, it seems deserted, but I sense the ghosts of train-travel past. Hear steam, a bell clanging. Newly hired Harvey Girls carrying their bags to the Castanada Hotel. The old station is not completely deserted; a young employee reminds me to don my mask.



A Harvey hotel, The Castanada, Las Vegas, NM.



The Plaza Hotel, Las Vegas, NM.

The Castanada has an excellent restaurant. Closed. Except for take-out. But no outdoor tables. I have to find another venue for lunch. On my way to the main plaza to see if the Plaza Hotel has outdoor dining, I pass over a treelined river on whose bridge is posted NO CELLPHONE USE ON OR NEAR BRIDGE. Probably, the area is a magnet for drug trafficking. The plaza is lush green with trees and shrubs. Spanish charm. The Plaza Hotel stunning; at its apex, an eye-catching broken pediment (Noonie loved such "violated" pediments). But it's closed. Turning to the left, I find an antique store, bravely open. Only 2 tourists, fully masked, peruse the old wares. I think it's safe to go in. The elderly, masked, owner, hobbling with his cane. insists with his arm and hand gestures: Yes, yes, it's safe! Come in.

A superior selection of oddities: stacks of old books (Noonie bait), old cowboy boots, even vintage leather

chaps, 78 and 45 r.p.m. records, 8-track tapes, *Life* magazines dating back to the 1930s. All manner of glassware and china, paintings/drawings of standard Southwest themes: Navajos, bearded prospectors, Comanches on horses, tranquil pueblo scenes, Harvey Girls posing with diners, Rio Chama and Bandelier landscapes, La Fonda Hotel, old steam locomotives



Noonie's grandfather, Fred (in the cab) with crew (1918).

(also Noonie bait, as his gramps, Fred, was a train engineer), Ledger art, and more. A treasure trove to pick over. I am in my element. I spy some colorful Mexican ceramic bowls, a decorative Indian arrow, a print of a mounted Plains Indian among buffalo.

"Wrap 'em up!" I tell the old man. He is beaming. Me? I am already seeing where my new purchases will stand or hang. I go on to ask him

where I might have lunch nearby and he advises on a Mexican restaurant on the other side of the Plaza, Maria's.

So I step into Maria's, more a "dive" than a restaurant, only to find: 1) all diners are *sans* mask; 2) ditto for the staff (one of whom, an old woman in the kitchen, probably the matriarch, is coughing, no, *hacking*, over the stove); 3) the table I am led to is has spilt Coke and is dirty; 3) the place stinks. I rush out, gagging over my close brush with "Covid Mary".



First synagogue, Las Vegas, NM.



Next roll of the culinary dice, up comes, another Mexican restaurant, across the plaza. A *real* restaurant: nice outside tables, masked staff, several masked Anglo couples gobbling tacos, guzzling tall margueritas, and pawing at a big bowl of tasty tortilla chips. Music playing. Faster than you can say "Fuck all yohos," I'm standing in line for a table. Next I'm ordering: a Green Chile Waygu Burger with Sweet Potato Fries, washed down with a Paloma Marguerita. (Oh, yes!) Then I dash for what is a spanking clean lady's room.

I'm stuffed — I'm not exaggerating, S-T-U-F-F-E-D. I mount Lexstacy, I ride off seeking my final Las Vegas destination: the 1st Jewish synagogue, Temple Montefiore (1884). Arriving, I see it's not the most architecturally stunning specimen, but it is part of the history of my People. As an unexpected *mitzvah*, I find the surrounding yard has an ample supply of extra large pine cones. I snatch some, planning to decoratively paint and sparkle them to match my dining room decor.

I leave, happy and refreshed, for Santa Fe at 4 p.m., early enough to avoid the late-afternoon Big Splashdown. Just in time to give Duffy and Snowy their 5 p.m.

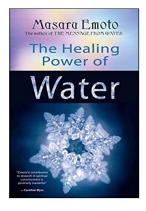
meds and repast. Just in time for me to take 2 Aleve for my hip pain. Picky's mission accomplished!

* * *

16.0



Byron, KOAT weatherman; he looks like Tintin.



Last night. Monsoon rains. This a.m., "petrichor" — that earthy smell associated with rain water hitting hot, dry soil, along with certain compounds like ozone, geosmin, and plant oils — mingles with an email from Mary that begins: "How was your jaunt to Las Vegas?" She adds that "during the monsoons, and now due to tennis star Novak Djokovic's interest, there's an uptick

in the sales of Japanese pseudo-scientist Masaru Emoto's *The Healing Power of Water* (2004) in Santa Fe. This, his 1st book on the topic, details his 'discovery' that crystals formed in frozen water revealed changes when specific, concentrated thoughts and music were directed toward them. He also found that water from clear springs and water, after exposed to loving words, showed brilliant, complex and colorful snowflake patterns. But polluted water, or water exposed to negative thoughts, formed incomplete, asymmetrical patterns with dull colors. Picky, as you know, people here are so into this kind of stuff *[imagine 'Twilight Zone"*

music]. But it doesn't hurt to refrain from cursing the deluge of water we get this time of the year; best to be on the safe side and say nice words to it, huh?"

I LOL. Look this guy up via Google. The data on his theory reads: *Emoto claims* that human speech or thoughts have dramatic effects on water. . . . Emoto claims that positive words and emotions, classical music and positive prayer directed at the water

produce beautiful crystals, while negative words and emotions and crude music, such as heavy metal, produce ugly crystals. I read he got a virus, and then pneumonia, while lecturing in Shanghai in 2014. Flown back to Japan, but died. Shade of the coronavirus. BTW, I can't stand Djokovic.





Exhausted from my Las Vegas explorations so to bed an hour early. Duffy and Snowy snug in their "Mutt Hole", we all 3 begin touring Slumberland. I don't know what the dogs dream, but I dream I become a "Green Goddess" in conversation with Hergé's famous character Tintin:

> I see myself stretched out on my chaise longue, naked. From above, I hear my body below remark: "Maybe I look very young but you don't

have a sense about my intelligence." *My body has become that of a 20-year old. Leaves start to grow out of that slim body. Leaves! And I am sending out roots now. A will of the instant. A sign of renewal. Like the Green Man in Rosslyn Chapel, Scotland. I hear my favorite cartoon character, Tintin, advise me in his peculiar way of speaking:* "Billions of bilious blue blistering barnacles! Ya, thinking of getting out, are you?" *I reply:* "I can't live without my Noonie." *Tintin says:* "We really need a change. I'm really suffocating as being here in this house. Oh I really love to travel so much. As you."

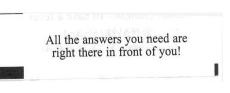
Now my demanding roots are long enough to start penetrating my red brick patio, down, down into New Mexican soil with its skeletons broken by violence, busy ants and other burrowing creatures, down, down. My roots thicken as they shift direction, move horizontally eastward, and north past mineral deposits (gold, silver, coal, reservoirs of black oil), until my roots turn upward, upward, upward past strata of past civilizations, past freshly planted COVID coffins, to finally push through the summer-soaked soil, emerging in my old Oak Park home's garden, staring up at a dark dawn, streaks of pale red, under a few high clouds.

I look like a pod-person resting on its back in situ in a scene from the 1956 movie Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Have I returned as an Earth Goddess revenant to draw sustenance from old soil? "Don't worry, Picky. You didn't soil your britches, I soiled your bitches!" puns a laughing Tintin. "Did you know this place ever before, Picky?" I see myself nodding agreement. He continues: "Seems a good place. Peaceable kingdom. What I mostly hate outside is corrupted minds, that is main problem in society. Returning home is always nice after every difficult cases. Home is not where you live, but where you are understood. Home is not an Emotional Rigidity Retreat. Ah, the mystery of comfort, of snug-snug, as good ol' Snowy knows." I again nod, my roots quiver and strain with my head gesture. "Final advice. Whenever you are in a difficult situation don't waste your time and energy to think. Just act as you have to do." This may be prodigious.

I awake about 7 p.m. Raise my blinds. Vapor covers my windowpane. I open my door onto the veranda, see the sky is overcast with dismal fish-scale clouds. Silence. Unlike my Oak Park home, no sirens, cars booming music, car horns, or jets overhead. I can hear Nature using a skill I call *écouture*, an act of attentive listening, as if I was at the opera or a concert, but the orchestra is my little patch of home in Aldea.

Unsteady, I wobble over to my dresser. I see a small version of modernist sculpture resting there. When closer, I find an unopened Lu Lu's fortune cookie. Forget how it got

there. Did I mean to eat it last night? Did 1 of the dogs drag it in and I just placed it up there? I crack it open — the sound seems LOUD — can't resist the snack, then read:



* *

I have two basic memories of Noonie: 1) eating; and 2) reading. These fundamental aspects of my husband's desire did delightfully mingle once. He was reading this excerpt from Gabriel Garcia Márguez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as cited in another book titled *Fictitious Dishes: An Album of Literature's Most Memorable Meals* by Dinah Fried (appropriate last name!), which I'd given him. Fried's scripto-visual text pairs quotes with photos of cuisine she created as inspired by the quote (which after my Green Goddess dream speaks to me today in ways it didn't previously):

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE

GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, 1967

Þ

ON RAINY AFTERNOONS, embroidering with a group of friends on the begonia porch, she would lose the thread of the conversation and a tear of nostalgia would salt her palate when she saw the strips of damp earth and the piles of mud that the earthworms had pushed up in the garden. Those secret tastes, defeated in the past by oranges and rhubarb, broke out into an irrepressible urge when she began to weep. She went back to eating earth. The first time she did it almost out of curiosity, sure that the bad taste would be the best cure for the temptation. And, in fact, she could not bear the earth in her mouth. But she persevered, overcome by the growing anxiety, and little by little she was getting back her ancestral appetite, the taste of primary minerals, the unbridled satisfaction of what was the original food.

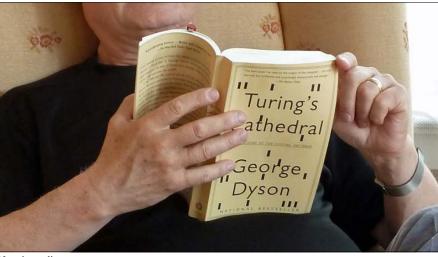


As for reading? Noonie was enamored with Reader Response Theory. In a notebook entry — while working a new book — he proposes an Introduction in which the reader, prior to entering the body of the text, is to acknowledge with a signature:

READ THE FOLLOWING AND SIGN BELOW:

How you read depends on your own imagination, education, age, gender, race, where you live, socioeconomic context, awareness of your body, battled a major disease or not, comprehension of language structures and functions, what interpretive communities you see yourself part of, how many times you've been in love, how many things, people, ideas and hopes you have lost, how many gained, how deeply you've experienced hurt and hope, books previously read, your relationship to politics, to the world of accidents, your transaction with other people and things. On whether you underline passages in the text, marginal glosses in the text, and/or dog-ear the pages.

I acknowledge my co-presence in determining the meaning of this text.



Noonie reading.

He annotated that the book was to be set in Verdana font. Noonie always used Verdana in his books because "it's a sans-serif typeface designed for maximum Internet legibility" by Matthew Carter for Microsoft. It's a kind of 'baptismal font' defining the birth of my experimental writing. I've dubbed it 'The Fontzie'."



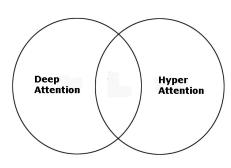
Omar Sharif.

But I don't like it. Too sterile. We argue over this many times. But he is adamant: "The Fontzie!" "The Fontzie!" Then looks down at his feet, shocked, as if his shoes were not the one's he put on that a.m.

"Times are New, Roman," I declare, striking back, Noonie-style (style as a means of insisting on something). "Imagine the film *Doctor Zhivago sans* Sharif — it wouldn't fly. The audience rail

against it, finding itself stuck with a typecast substitute." He's speechless. Hoisted him on his own petard! But he never switches to serifed fonts. No, it is always: "The Fontzie!" "The Fontzie!" Fancy that.

N. Katharine Hayles on reading. She makes a distinction between deep attention



Classifieds.

SHADE-GROWN BROADLEAF hand tended and rolled. \$2 roach. 87-307.

PRESENT WHEREABOUTS Agosto T. Agnelli. Call Corporation security for Interpol. Reward.

STORIES, POEMS published. Perfect way to preserve memories for your children. Surprisingly low cost. Publishers' rep, 87-349.

ANYBODY FROM Pittsburgh or Paducah? I'm homesick, 88-226.



(normative reading, focusing on a single object thoroughly for an extended time) and *hyper attention* (rapid switch of focus, often, as encouraged by surfing the Web and playing video games). Noonie wanted to put those modes together in his own rhizomatic mode of authorship, explaining so in his notebook with an overlapping Venn diagram. Just another reason, he said, for wanting to use a font ubiquitous in the digital world. He told me he'd like to use a wacky diary-ish form in his next book, written in the 3rd person, but in the *future* tense, presenting events in non-chronological order so as to avoid the trap of self-preemptively knowing himself. Impossible, of course."

Well, he'd be proud I am at least attempting a sort of diary here, albeit set in Times New Roman. My text is full of facts — like this sampling of Classified Ads from our local newspaper — but they are 2-fold: 1) existence as event; then 2) their pre-

servation in language. Statement then becomes truth, overriding that of the event. Can't help it. Related issue: Can reality be broadcast and remain real?

The weather is clearing after days of heavy rain. The cool-down after the deluge is no longer. It's hot today with 82 percent humidity, My neighbors' air-conditioning is broken. I see their windows are open, I can hear their 2 little boys' yells. Going nuts, I presume, on their Playstation 4. Probably playing

Beserk and the Band of the Hawk, a Japanese hack-and-slash action game, which I know they got for Christmas. Perfect example of hyper attention in action. Will they be able, when older, to accomplish deep attention when reading at highschool and college levels? Noonie would be skeptical. By early 2000, he noticed a marked decline in his students' ability to concentrate for long periods of time, their willingness to even just read.



As the temperature climbs outside, so does the depressing statistics on the Reign of COVID XIX, spreading in record numbers across the South and Southwest. Yet still, Millennials flock to beaches, bars, and church services *sans* masks, no social-distancing. No concern for the vulnerable, conflating authoritarianism with simple authority. We have lost the sense of community in this country. Heartless. One woman pepper-sprays a man who refuses to wear a mask. She's not being charged.

I need diversion. I downloaded on my Kindle a few days ago Henry Green's 1943 novel *Caught*. Read his earlier *Party Going* in college, liked it, so . . . I plop down in my comfy TV chair, Snowy and Duffy flank me. I begin where I left off, a romantic scene. Not the kind of 1st date one can deny afterward was a date; more like Jasper Johns' "Take an object. Do something to it. Do something else to it":

... The relief he experienced when their bodies met was like the crack on a snow silent day, of a branch that breaks to fall under a weight of snow, as his hands went like two owls in daylight over the hills, moors, and wooded valleys, over the fat white winter of her body.

Odd coincidences here. I flash on Noonie telling me about a branch falling before him the day his sister died (his bathroom mirror cracking prior to that), on the incident with the owl stuck in my kiva fireplace, and then on my decision to restart Weight Watchers.

:

Pre-lockdown, I mused pleasantly over the title *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as I also did over the title of Michael Curtiz's1932 crime film *20,000 Years in Sing Sing*. Something about the exaggerated time span and possible language play: "Sol-Itude" (a positive attitude about sun-worship) and "Sing Sing" (damned in Hell to sing folk songs non-stop in a Mad Hootenanny hosted by the shade of Jack Linkletter, featuring The Journeymen, The Limeliters, the Chad Mitchell Trio, The New Christy Minstrels, The Brothers Four, Ian & Sylvia, The Big 3, Hoyt Axton, Judy Collins, Johnny Cash, The Carter Family, Flatt & Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys, The Tarriers, Bud & Travis, and the Smothers Brothers).

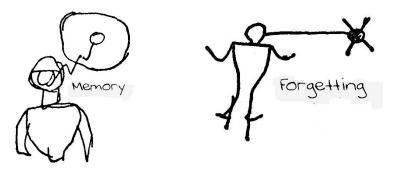
Since the lockdown — NO LIKEE! — for obvious reasons. No more *immense* days when 24 hours felt like a month, but which at the same time seemed to transpire in a second. Example: a day with Noonie in Venice. We all seem doomed to serve 365 + days in solitude in a global village turned toxic under the Reign of His Evil Majesty COVID XIX, which has altered our perceptions of things, amped up our stressors, divided us:

Family life	Social relations	ldeological positions
Old	Wealthy	Red
versus	versus	versüs
Young	Poor	Blue states
City	Trump	Fact
versus	versus	versus
Country	Biden	Fake News

Bad shit or — more politely and linguistically rich, using the opening line of *Ubu Roi*, Alfred Jarry's absurdist play —

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"MERDRE!"
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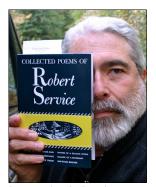
One thing that hasn't gone to shit is my relationship with my grandkids. The nearest thing to certainty here is a grandmother. FaceTime 'em often; exchange letters, too. In my last chat with the kids several days ago, I told them "Grandma's memory isn't what it once was." Give them a sense of my ageing, maybe so that when I am gone, they will see it as part of life. Their letter arrives with two drawings. "Grandma we each drew a picture for you!"



They look like pictographs from an ancient site. I fear the kids' pictorial innocence, which has resulted in stunning images in color and monochrome during their early life, will be lost as they enter latency, when fantasies get contained and defended against.

When Noonie, a fan of Surrealism, lived in Los Angeles, he never missed the annual International Children's Art Exhibition at Barnsdall Art Park. Then he'd zoom over to the Pasadena Art Museum and muse over the bold forms of the German Expressionists works in their permanent collection. On the way back, halfway between Pasadena and L.A. proper, he'd stop at Mount Washington and take the elevator up through the mountain into the Southwest Museum of the American Indian to renew old friendships with certain aspects of their collection.

The art of the Indigenous People of the Southwest has retained its profound access to the personal and collective unconscious. When we initially visited Santa Fe, just prior to Noonie's demise, we were both drawn to Native Art like moths to a flame. And those flames burned bright on Museum Hill and at the Institute of American Arts. Now my sources of wonder are closed. No gallery entry, no lectures. A deprivation I deeply feel. Virtual tours



I am very handy. I can be at your beck and call — Mark A.

can only partially restore my connection to these precious resources.

If I could face-date here, my choice for our 1st meeting would be lunch at the Museum Cafe on Museum Hill (noting what the guy ordered and his table manners), then a stroll through the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian (is he bored or interested). In 1 punch, I'd know if the relationship stood up to my picky expectations.

In lieu of such once normal contact, I've been perusing my Hinge dating app, keeping in mind my father's warning (we were ocean fishing): "If you put a line in for a fish, you might

just catch a squid." *But what I find* My Octopus Friend? Today, I spy a bearded guy I might be interested in. Seems to have the air of smoothie-drinking good health and he's the only man whose profile photo shows him holding a book, *The Collected Poems of Robert Service*, no less. "The Bard of the Yukon," as Service is known as; he lived in a cabin in Dawson City, Yukon. Of Scotch ancestry, like my magnificent Duffy, he wrote: "The Wanderlust has got me . . . by the belly-aching fire." Handsome in his photo (no facial lines, no trace of bitterness), he's telling potential dates of his lusts: poetry, travel; the 1-eye peeking out is seductive, a camera-eye scanning me head-to-toe. Got has Butane in his veins, and this, in a time of deplorable, cruel chimpanzees inspired by the bellows and chest-thumping of the Immanent Baboon. I imagine him in Portland side-by-side with the protesters, having his face shaven with mace, in the dark, by agents of the Federal Government, as he laughs and mimics a slide guitar to provoke them further. But what if he adheres to a sour comment by Service that "Marriage is a bachelor's punishment for his sins"? Well, if so, he probably wouldn't have put his profile up. But maybe he just wants casual — you know. Or is he a clever con man like Brian in *The Good Liar*? Am I a mere mark for him?

Picky, calm down. All answers you need are right there in front of you. Okay. Maybe I should message this guy (his name is "Mark A."), tell him I studied Service in college along with Kipling (S. was once referred to as "the Canadian Kipling"). That I got an A, like his last name. Mark A. — why that's an anagram of *karma*! But is it good or bad karma? Roll those dice, Picky. Inform him that our discussion in that poetry class included:

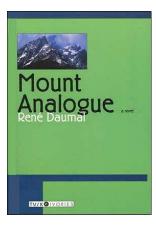


Did Service write poetry or verse? Whichever, he was *at my service* when he offered a bit of good advice: "Be master of your petty annoyances and conserve your energies for the big, worthwhile things. It isn't the mountain ahead that wears you out — it's the grain of sand in your shoe."

So true. I might ask Mark, "What's the grain in your shoe?" (Basically, this is the key psychoanalytic question posed to the analysand.) My 1st husband didn't have a mere grain in his shoe; oh no, it was a small rock! In comparison, Noonie-the-Soft-Squeeze had only a small sunflower seed in his.

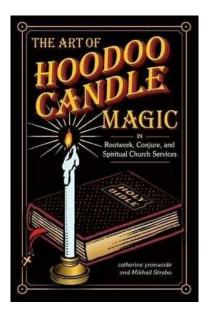
What's the grain in *my* shoe? Psychoanalyst, know thy self. When we walk a mile in someone else's shoes, we have to contend with the grain in their's, too. Then we may appreciate our own grain a bit more. I grit my teeth and message Mark. It's a chess move further into a new life, tryin' to not truck along all my old baggage in my shoe.

*



Starting a new relationship at an advanced age. I feel like I am at the bottom of a mountain, Mount Analogue, looking up at a difficult climb up to base camp Friendship, halfway to the peak called Love where 2 live as 1 in perfect serenity. Just to reach Friendship, a delicate and rare thing, takes time (of which I don't have much left) and is predicated on taking a winding path I call "Five Spice Street": 1) mutual trust; 2) mutual respect; 3) reciprocal interest; 4) shared commitments; and, 5) compatible senses of humor. "Spices" Noonie and I always seasoned our relationship with, especially, the shared humor. The result for us was a peak experience we called in German *gelassenheit*, but

which we spelled *g-e-l-a-s-s-e-n-h-e-i-g-h-t*). The highest peak of serenity this lass has experienced in her life. Can I hope to find such again?



Pay attention, Picky! Open yourself to the other as other, to uncertainty. I-Thou stuff. Buber.

But what if Hashem turns out to be a quantum field. A metaphysical smoke and mirrors?

Open—you to have get close to judge, to love.

When monkeys get look into mirrors, they initially look at their genitals. I-thou requires patients patience. And maybe a candle and a little hoodoo. Especially, now during the Reign of COVID XIX. Lately, I've been so worried about my epitaph, I wonder if I can sustain living my life under these conditions.

Lass, I've got the perfect book to enlighten you, make you wax strong, able to melt hearts, taper your figure. But you must read this self-help book as experimental literature. New insights, new modes. A subjective science.

Oh! The way fashion is never finished?

Yes. Then be prepared for whale-hearted appro-

bation.

But I fear punitive wranglings. So much of this in online tweets.

Remember, just substitute an 's' for the 't' in tweets to get 'sweets'. Like yummy heartshaped chocolates.

Toute suites?

So my mind wacky-wanders, wonders. Wanderlust for something sweet. Somebody sweet. **I grit my teeth and message Mark**. This time I *mean* it, not just *write* it. Ya grok?

* *



Yes. I'm looking for "good folk" here. Looking for signs of that goodness. I see more *signs* since I moved here! The whole place is swimming in signs, a monsoon deluge of signs: Spanish, Native American, Gringo-Populist, and Gringo-Capitalist. Signs of goodness, is what I seek.

That's why I *don't* respond to a Hinge posting by "Swampthroat", whose "portrait" is an image of a kangaroo bouncing on a trampoline. I imagine him as short, stocky, wild-haired guy in an untucked white shirt, unbuttoned almost to the waist like artist Julian Schnabel, the cuffs stained with coffee from walking and drinking at the

same time, legs stuffed into grease-stained blue jeans. When asked about his favorite song, he'd immediately blurt out "Paperback Writer."

I refuse ("Not interested, thnx") an invite in bold font by an eager guy calling himself "Opus Dei Diego." His photo revels a pulse of sadness in his rough face's arched eyebrow. Wants to meet for lunch ("socially-distanced") at La Plazuela eatery in the historic La Fonda Hotel. Tempts me by mentioning "Ethel's Chicken Salad Croissant, an original menu item on the Harvey House offerings of yore." He, himself, says he "wants to order Huitlacoche Tamal-Grilled Sweet Corn, dolled up with pistachio-green chile cream, cashew cake barley salad with grilled apples, dried figs, red onions, and seasonal vegetables." Jeeze!

I see all it now. Diego, here early, waddles in, head turns left and right like a searchlight, then upward, looking up for surveillance cameras. A small bouquet of purple flowers is made smaller by his girth. Looks like a "Cowboys for Trump" in his western boots and hat, blue jeans. In keeping with the Opus Dei thing, he sports a hairshirt with a set of prayer beads hanging off a belt loop used to hold the girdle that tightens the garment around his waist. I imagine him imagining himself as suave, debonair, standing facing me, extending his arms, singing (off key) lyrics from R.E.M.'s song "Hairshirt":

I am not the type of dog / That could keep you waiting For no good reason / Run a carbon-black test on my jaw And you will find it's all been said before I can swing my megaphone / And long arm the rest It's easier and better to just beat it from the chest Of desire /So alone / So all alone in my life Feed me banks of light /And hang your my hairshirt on the lowest rung

I think: The totalitarian mind accepts diversity with difficulty. By nature it's monologic [think Mikhail Bakhtin] only permitting a single voice emitted by the master [think Trump] and slavishly repeated by his subjects. A paralysis of ideas the result.

That hairshirt, bulging at his waist, announces in alternating red and blue letters: BIG LULA'S COWBOY KARAOKE NIGHT. His hyperthyroid eyes enlarge even

more, appreciating my Johnny Was outfit. He comes towards me, slowly, opening his arms wider and wider, until I can't see anything else in the lobby — I thought this was supposed to be a socially-distanced date — until I can't see anything else but his moon-shaped face and that awful hairshirt with the word COWBOY dancing up and down with his breathing. He wiggles his big eyebrows in a way that says "Food?" *A frozen moment*. Next second, I'm all ass 'n elbows dashing toward the ladies room down the long uncarpeted hall, my clicking high heels sending out \cdots /--- / \cdots S-O-S signals.

Come on, Picky, you hyperbolizin' perpetrator of datin' denial. Calm down. Relax. Remember the old adage: "A woman who lies down prone on a bed should have a good reason." Huh?

You are too good at procrastination, girl. At what is apparently a domilic inertia.

Yes, I have my very own little nation with its well-stamped passport. My mind often works like the 'delay codes' function in WordPerfect.

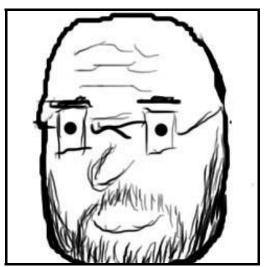
Get back on the main track, Picky. Dump the 'engaged apathy' act. Believe, every day in every way you are getting bolder and bolder. Okay, Picky? Picky? Picky? Picky?

Okay!

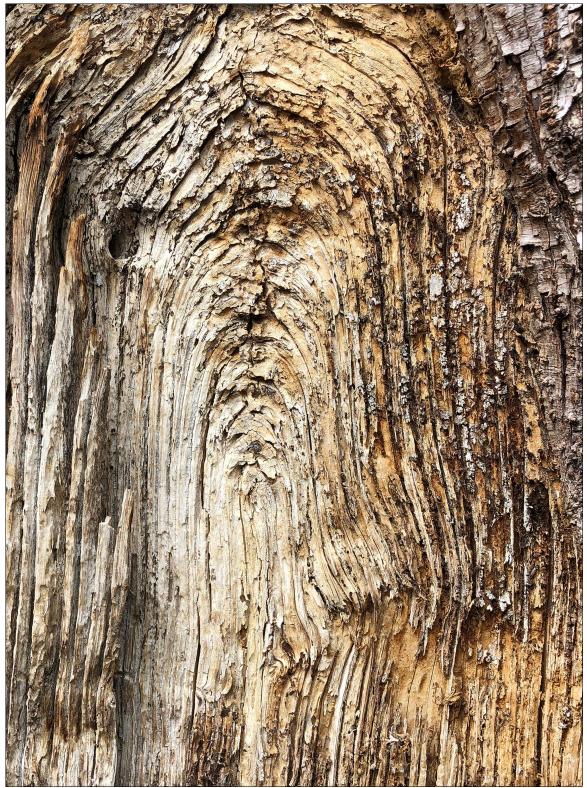
"Dear Mark," I begin . . .

* * *

INTERMISSION



Noonie (pre-radiation with beard, 2010) Picky Hunting.



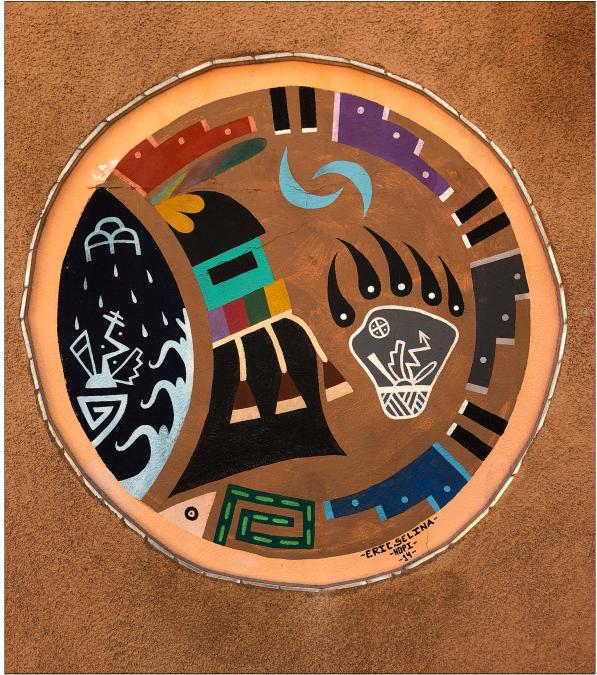
The Dead Christ (After the Shroud of Turin, 2020) Picky Hunting.



Madrid See-Through (2020) Picky Hunting.



The Tesuque Village Market Restaurant (2020) Picky Hunting.



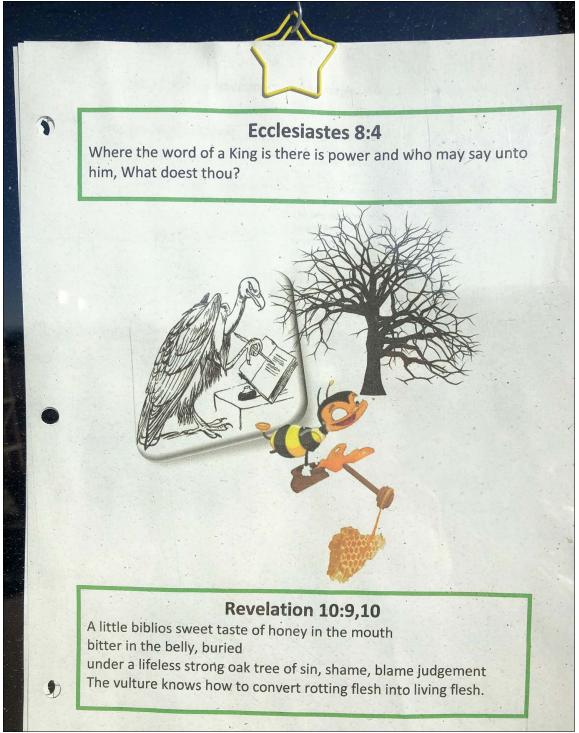
Wall Mural, Madrid, NM (Hopi artist, Eric Selina, 2020) Picky Hunting.



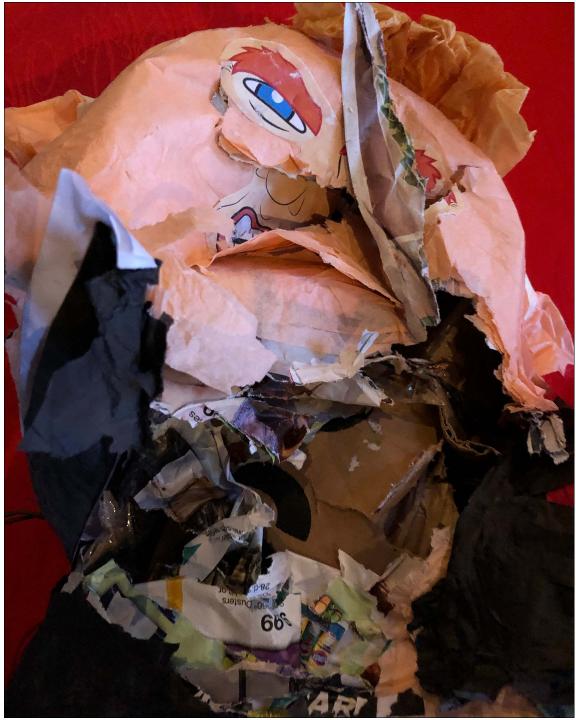
Sun Cursive (2020) Picky Hunting.



Folk Museum, visitor response board, Santa Fe, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.



Enigmatic Window Posting, Artist Studio Window, Aldea Plaza (2020) Picky Hunting.



Trump Piñata Dada: Post-Pummeling Performance Photograph (New Year's Eve, 2020) Picky Hunting.

17.0

You with the intentness of your studies / And the elation of your knowledge / Can make the experience of struggle / The property of all / And transform justice / Into a passion.

- Bertolt Brecht, "An Address to Danish Worker Actors"

I break the ice with Mark by probing his social conscience, bringing up the pandemic, the huge loss of life, attaching a flick to my message which I took in the Santa Fe Plaza. It's a truck decorated with Basia Irland's elegiac water painting. A mobile mural monument. I tell him my friend, Vita, had studied with Basia at UNM. It was a "landmark" in her career. *Stay impersonal at this point, Picky. Probe, but probe* solo un poco, *and subtly*.

I go on to ask his position on the hoopla over "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," the Black



Pandemic Elegy (2020), artwork by New Mexican artist Basia Irland.

national anthem, being performed prior to "The Star Spangled Banner" at each of the NFL's Week 1 games in 2020. I mention the racist rant response to this by New Mexico's

"Cowboys for Trump" leader Couy Griffin, who asked why dissatisfied Blacks don't just "go back to Africa." Griffin also offered to give people of color what he called a "101" lesson on racial identity, saying anyone who does not identify as "American" 1st or opposes the 2nd Amendment right to bear arms should leave the U.S.: "Go home." Nice guy.



"Cowboys for Trump" march.

Our lively online exchange concerning these issues confirms to me Mark's politics are "right on the mark." He tells me, "The dead will not be safe from Trump," adding that while dialoguing via our keyboards, he's listening to a haunting music CD of Bektashi (Turkish) music performed by Ezgi Stump and the College of William and Mary Middle Eastern Music Ensemble. "Picky," he types, "a piece titled 'Ötme Bülbül Ötme' is on now. God, the female singer is amazing! The sounds are mesmerizing. I often listen while chugging shots of *raki*, the Turkish national drink popularly known as 'Lion's Milk,' made of twice-distilled grapes and aniseed. Helps me sooth the lockdown blues. . . . Picky, life's a hard thing; you never come out of it alive!" I send him a LOL for that last remark.

At some point I type, contra COVID: "I miss the easy adventure of magically being

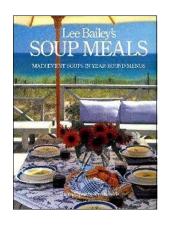


The Black Prince.

led by the hand." He agrees.We move on to discussing our passion for reading. We find an agreement between us that we've learned how to live partly through books. I mention that "My 1st husband learned almost *everything* from books. Family life was so miserable, he completely retreated into books." Tell Mark that, given Noonie's damaged psyche, "it was amazing he could make me believe that together we could find music in any city in the world." Mark goes on to relate some of his peculiarities, like a pencil he's named "Black Prince": "It's a large black graphite pencil,

rectangular like a carpenter's pencil. Sort of a fetish I carry in my left pocket." Yep. Weird.

Black Prince. Black plague. Too close for comfort. At a certain point in our typed exchange — I must've been whining on about my isolation, my bad hip, etc — Mark told me, "I abhor self-pity, Picky, Avoid it! It's the plague of many an intellectual and octogenarian." It seems he "lacks illusions," as he put it, "Without illusions, I avoid disillusionment." *Noonie was like that*, I recall.



Next, we are exchanging ideas about soups and find, amazingly, we both have the same soup cookbook, *Lee Bailey's Soup Meals*. Bailey (dead at 76, my age) was known for his writing, cooking and photography and his work as a designer of home furnishings (skills I share, in a minor mode, with him). I write Mark that my favorite summer cocktail is a "Bailey" (lime juice, grapefruit juice, muddled mint, and gin); he replies he adores Baileys Irish Cream, "an Irish cream liqueur flavored with cream, cocoa, and Irish whiskey, made by Diageo at Nangor Road in Dublin." We share a LOL, when it becomes obvious that "There is a peculiar pattern of doublin' going on

here, Picky." *Great pun*! Has Noonie's spirit entered Mark's fingers and, like a player piano, is typing for him?

We discuss cuisine. As for soup, Mark has 2 favorites: 1) "Polish-style borsch [sic], meaning it has apple vinegar added to it to counteract the sweetness of the beets"; and, 2) "Sorrel soup with a whole hot-boiled egg, which the eater slices before eating. Before the soup, he serves Octopus Ceviche washed down with Crémant d'Alsace Rosé."



Death wall mural, Tesuque, NM.

I can't stomach octopus, but love other types of ceviche; adore the Crémant (Noonie did, too). I caution him: "Mark, sorrel contains oxalic acid and calcium oxalate — these are quite poisonous if eaten in profusion and can cause a host of nasty side effects such as vomiting, muscular twitchings, convulsions, and there has even been, for God sake, a recorded case of 'death by sorrel' in Slovakia."

"Picky, if I contract a painful, mortal illness [this being what I term THE DIAGNOSIS], "I would go on massive doses of sorrel soup, dipping in those rectangular Swedish WASA crackers for their fiber content. The Gourmand's-Way-to-Go, heh?"

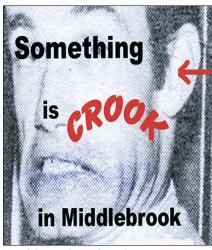
"I'm 'sorrel' to hear about that, Mark." I shiver.

He makes death seem so real. As so do many murals and artworks I've come across here in New Mexico. (Everything here has a deep history of its own.) Nothing like it in Chicago, except for The Grim Reaper's literal daily presence in the "Chi-Raq" section of town. I ask

him what he is wearing right now. I'm trying to guess . . . Let it not be Noonie's pleated, toofull below the hip, out-of-style-shorts, puleeeze!

"A crisp white shirt paired with a simple dark and well-cut suit, sandals, no socks," adding a winking emoji. *Ah, wit and imagination!* He confesses he has "a peculiar hobby." *Oh, no!* But it's harmless.





Noonie's experimental novel.

who collects matchbook covers. I have a superb collection, started as a kid. Thought it more fun that collecting stamps. *Noonie had a stamp collection as kid.* "I'm shooting you a jpeg of a set from WWII. Colorful and fun, interesting designs, historical, too. I'm trying to interest a wallpaper design company to produce wallpaper repros — based on themes like 'The Great Depression,' 'WWII,' 'The Sixties,' and so forth — from my vast collection."

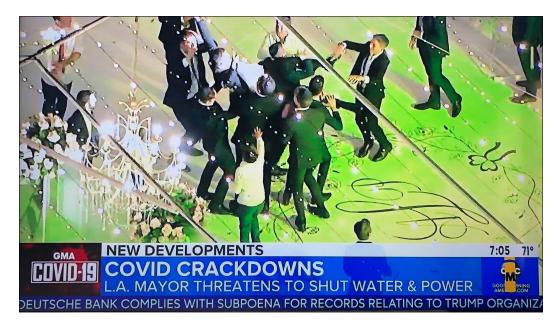
"I'm a phillumenist, Picky." Huh? "That's a person

"Interesting idea," I respond. I can hardly wait to see your collection, Mark." I tell him about Noonie's stamp collection, his passion for triangular-shaped stamps. He remarks on my constant references to my deceased hubby. You speak as if he was yet to come." *Think it worries him*.

I confess that I find myself citing Noonie over and over throughout my diary (yes, I inadvertently mentioned it). "Mark, it's like that German critic Walter Benjamin wanting to compose a book entirely of quotations. Something Noonie aspired to, and almost accomplished, in his wacky 2012 experimental novel *Something is Crook In Middlebrook*. BTW, the guy on the cover (see attached jpeg) is Barry Goldwater, Jr. No shit! Noonie once worked in the photo lab at Litton Industries in Woodland Hills, CA, and found this gag shot in their negative archives; it was made at a company party where Goldwater Jr. was a guest speaker, where everyone was, eventually, 4-sheets-to-the-wind. Noonie said

it, 'Captured the spirit of the late-70s.' Could be now, too, given the shenanigans going on in those wild, maskless, not socially-distanced Millennial orgies of End of the World fun we see on TV these days. It figures, Mark, my grimace upon seeing a close-up of the Immanent Baboon's visage on a large-screen TV."

"Yes. My response, too," Mark says, doublin' my offerin'. "Sorry, but if the beautiful appears, so must the ugly. The existence of your good hip, Picky, relies on the logical



existence of a bad hip." A bit Jesuitical, I think, But he does have a gift for repartee. Maybe it's going to be 'out of the narrowness of my world into the largeness of Mark's,' sharing dizzy peaks with him. Whoa, Picky, pull back on the reigns, girl!

I type a time-out to Mark: "T-O, T-O, T-O. Let's continue, no, *escalate* this, tomorrow over the phone, okay?" He agrees, marking "late afternoon," making a few typos doing so. We exchange numbers, his "good numbers," as per Noonie's weird numerology.

I shakily stand up from my desk chair to stretch my legs. My floor-length mirror catches me, displays me as if posing for a French artist's sketch: The ankle of my foot on



The Arctic Monkeys and a doubling mask.

which I put my weight (due to my bad hip) is posed vertically under the dimple on my neck, *directly* vertical. The 2 of me exchange gazes, as we study and question the visible. Anxiety in my eyes seem to dissolve my eye sockets. *Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire*? I query of my reflection, it queries of me. It doubles what I say in the present tense. Eyes fixed like a deer's in headlights, my mind strays to Noonie then to appropriate song lyrics by the Arctic Monkeys:

The mirror's image / Tells me it's home time But I'm not finished / 'Cause you're not by my side

* *



Contemplation Station VI, Rio Grande (2015) Basia Irland.

I am in need of a respite from my house. I Google artist Basia Irland's webpage, seeking the location of a *Contemplation Station* she constructed awhile ago.

I found a list of her outdoor projects, soon a photo of her occupying her Station VI along the Rio Grande. Wow! She looks a bit like me, I must say. It does look like the perfect

place to bring binocs and identify birds, take heavy doses of Chillaxin. I always find such "birding" involves a weird, momentary intimacy, as if at that moment I was addressing the bird, silently praying for its reply: *Tsoooet! Tsoooet!*

Just this morning a hummingbird with 2 yellow streaks on its tail boldly hovers right in front of my kitchen window for about 30 seconds, inches from nose, staring in to see what its occupant was up to (making Weight Watcher pancakes). A brief halt in its becoming. He/she tells me: "I was. I am. I will be." A species statement. Amazing! I want to invite this little helicopter in. Watch he/she defy gravity. But, hell, what if it's a small, disguised spy drone from some shithead government agency? From Google mapping the area or seeking



History marker, Museum Hill, Santa Fe, NM.

consumer data on what people have for breakfast? They make 'em look like real animals now, you know. Someone has been flying a small drone around in Aldea, peeking in people's windows. Our H.O.A. has confirmed this disturbing fact.

I said I want to escape my prison today. Join a wagon train. Get out. No go. It's depressing, monsoon rain's have just set in (subjective POV); It's wet yet I shouldn't grumble (practical

POV); It's dull and grey (moralistic and visual POV). Three POVs re: my *Umwelt* this morning. I *am* systematic despite my "inventory problem" (my son's words).

"I know now more fully the bouquet of the world," I tweet Vita, as rain continues to cascade out of my roof's downspouts and splash on my veranda like small waterfalls. "I can get drunk from having drunk from the universal whole; unprecedented sensations felt in my new life here," I write as the dogs cower under my desk chair. "Poetry dates from days like these," I continue in a hopeful spirit.

Feet more firmly planted our harsh, unromantic reality, she harps on the consequence of numerous material developments impinging on millions today: "The essential condition for any sort of unity in our world, any real bouquet, Picky, is the end of exploitation — equal rights." To make her point, she adds a posting from the Santa Fe Bulletin Board concerning a hate crime at my favorite sushi joint last night, Kohnami, which serves up great Chirashi Sushi. It's located on Guadalupe Street in what was once home to Film Is Truth (a Godard truism) video store (until the online streaming, etc. turned it into a dinosaur):

I understand your frustration in this pandemic. However, I don't think it is good idea throw a rock breaking my local restaurant's window. I am suffering enough not only because of this economic situation, but also because I am recovering from my disease known as polycythemia. Also, Vera, my wife has breast cancer. After hearing the sounds of our breaking window — if you are unburdened — I hope you are back in your track.





Kohnami Restaurant with boarded up window and my shadow.

"Looks like the work of the same shits that defaced that Indian restaurant a few weeks ago, huh, Picky? Hitler youth."

"M 'n M's, short for Maniacal Monoculturalists."

"Picky, our political inertia must be overcome. We *are* seeing it happen now. Today, one belongs either here or there; there is no middle."

"The life that has borne me over the years is still in my hands and eyes, Vita."

"Problem is Picky, there is no single unknown quantity in our equations, gotta deal with the interactions of many unknowns and variables. Makes all too many feel helpless, prisoners of their own sense of increasing powerlessness."

"Some turn to a fact denying fascism due to it."



COVID XIX rides to Sturgis, South Dakota. Weeks afterward some attendees caught coronavirus, 1 died so far.

"Witness that disgusting motorcycle rally in Sturgis, South Dakota. Drop an Abomb on 'em and POOF goes 250, 000 votes for Trump, eh Picky?"

"Well, figure many of those "Deplorables" will be on ventilators and unable to vote by November. But it is the town's citizens I feel sorry for."

Vita and I get off onto the topic of the election interference by China (pro-Biden) and Russian (pro-Trump). How powerful people in Washington are helping Russia. Had such occurred in the early 1950s, they'd be executed as traitors! How the Internet now permits a more global and pernicious interference than, say, Voice of America or Radio Moscow ever did back in the 1950s and 60s. "What we did to Russian then has come back to haunt us, Putin us in a sad situation," I tell her.

"Picky, the mass media and modern communication systems force folks to constantly adapt and re-adapt to the data forced down their gullets. Gets confusing."

"It was the force of that very system that Noonie fought against by his belief in, and application of, *chance*. He thought the laws of chance (the cosmic/comic roll of the dice) embrace all other laws and are as unfathomable as the depths from which all life flows, which, for him, was only comprehensible by surrendering to one's unconscious. Why he loved the anti-logics of Dada and Surrealism."

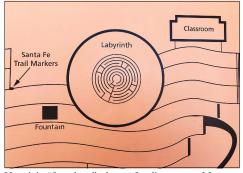
"Ya, art is an expression of our sense of the inadequacy of the Given, girl."

"Chance was how Noonie mediated between good fortune and disappointment. Not a line of bitterness on his face — why I chose him — at least up until the last few months of his life. Then . . ." I expand on Noonie's last days. We discuss Yersinia Pestis' thesis in her book (I already sent Vita via e-mail a pdf attachment of my "Pestis Who?" Letter to the Editor; see page v).

"He was murdered, Picky. Face it. I know academia. A place with no scruples since neo-liberalism — deregulation, contingent workers, etc. — got its hooks into it."



I Believe I Can Fly (portrait of Noonie, 2011) Picky Hunting.



Noonie's "found art" photo of a diagram on Museum Hill, Santa Fe, NM



Untitled, Picky Hunting.

I dodged the topic by going on about some interesting differences between my approach to creative expression and Noonie's. "My underlying creative 'thing' has to do with *mirrors*, but Noonie's was more about *diagrams*, with what is not so self-evident, if you catch my drift." To make my point, I shoot her of a jpeg Noonie took back when we came here for the Creativity and Madness Conference, a shot made on Museum Hill. "I would never have taken that picture, Vita. What I shot that

day was vastly different." I send her another jpeg. "Here, look, this shot displays my feelings of uplifting hope, of the world reflecting me and vice versa. Noonie once told me I often stood, during our travels, overlooking a landscape in a strange way that suggested that if I stretched out a hand, I could touch it. 'It's not the landscape you are reaching for, but the future,' he told me. You know, Noonie often comes out of the page when I try reading — at times when I'm writing, too — tosses his bald head, puts on his cap, and smiles, then fades away."

"Picky . . ." There's a tone of pity in her typed words.

I know I need to stop referencing my ex so often. Keeping to the uplifting theme we are on, I tell Vita about my recent daring online dialogue with Mark. "When we talked, I imagined I had the Milky Way around my neck (a

diamond necklace). I swear, the 2 hemispheres of my eyes were at full-speed, zig-zagging across my LCD screen, flaring into 'blazing cinders' (Noonie's punful re-naming of the French poet, Blaise Cendrars, who influenced Apollinaire's poetry) as I continued to read Mark's *at your service* replies."

"Now that's better, Picky! To be a human, well, ya gotta toss your entire life into the Bingo cage and see what number comes up."

I mention that I can't shake off doubts, though. "When Mark told me he was a phillumenist, I mistook it for a second for phlebotomist, a collector of blood, rather than matchbook covers. I have a special horror of seeing blood. But I then started to think *Might that indicate Mark's propensity for arson*? Baloney, of course, but . . . "

"You say he started collecting as a kid?"

"Yes, well, more like pre-teen. Might signal an incendiary personality."

"Or simply a flare for fashion, Picky. Calm down. Block that paranoid thing of yours. Accept it. The guy's HOT, that's all. A perfect match. Book a masked-distanced-meet with him somewhere that strikes you as romantic. Remember, masks are sexy. What does, or did, Mark do for a living"?

"Arts administration, some criticism, too. Does art, too. Creative. Imaginative." "Sounds both cool *and* hot."

"Not that he's snob or anything like that, Vita. He's NOT typical of the curatorial / museum type, patronizing and snobbish, guarding their grave civic responsibility by looking at outsiders as cultural paupers in need of receiving charity. I can *feel* that through his words. Noonie and I have met those types often; unfortunately, they often treat artists the same way. A curator thinks of himself as superior to an artist."

"Hell, Picky, they wouldn't have a job but for the artist."

"They see themselves a step up socially from the art-maker, smarter, too."

"Better groomed and dressed for sure."

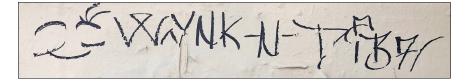
"A middle link between the rich and the poor art worker."

"Just as gallery owners are. Both are a kind of sales people."

"Sales peuple, in French translates as 'dirty people', Vita. How 'bout that?"

"Nice. That come from Noonie?"

"By the way, I discover Mark likes asemic writing, digs Cy Towmbly's artwork. So I sent him a jpeg of a photo I did recently on Guadalupe Street. Graffiti meets Towmbly. Found asemic writing. He was impressed."



"Speaking of art. Did you see this on the news today?" She shoots a jpeg my way:



"Shit, Vita. I think I saw that statue in the Capitoline Museum when Noonie I were on vacation."

"The selfie thing is getting out of hand. People falling off precipices . . ."

"My 'Selfie' gets out of hand — I often fall now. Unsteady legs. Vita, among all the divers cultures, I think it noteworthy that none ever established a God of Gravity!"

With that, we sign-off our live chat. I log onto the Santa Fe Bulletin Board, read more about the disturbing Kohnami incident. People are reacting with unwavering support for the owner and his plight. I post I will "double my trips there to pick up Bento boxes and Chirashi Sushi, even go eat in person at their outdoor dining." I scroll down the postings and find an odd one from a local realtor:

Have a colonics-crazy client getting a weird vibe from a house she purchased through me. A poltergeist she yells at: "Friend or enema?" Needs a spiritual cleaner / curandera / shaman — someone who can talk to the house with her. — Force Majur/TIA

Okay. . . . I'm learning this kind of New Age-ness is in tune with Santa Feans' fixation on alternative medicine / counter-cultural lifestyles / spiritualism. Like natural healing therapist, Ina Divvy Jawls, who I run into at a jewelry store as I wait to get a battery for my watch. We get to chatting about our physical ills; she recommends I have my own blood transfused *directly* into my bad knee — "It's called platelet-rich plasma (PRP). Works for me. Another remedy you might try is called The Fear Cup Cure. You can buy the cup on

my website; it's a small brass bowl engraved with filigree geometric patterns and some verses from the Koran arranged in the form of flower. Fill it with Evian bottled water and leave it outside under the stars for a night. It's works best in a desert climate. Then drink the star-blessed water while praying — there is a sample prayer on my blog — that it will alleviate your pain, cure you. Simple. And it works. Here's my card, Mrs. . . ."

"Picky, just Picky."

Her card is embossed gloss with red text on a white field. It lists her business webpage as *www.muchomasdivvyjawls* with a link to her health blog, "IN HOT BLOOD" promoting such outside-the-box procedures.

"Ah, no thanks!" I grab my re-powered wrist watch, dash out without stopping to strap it on. Bee-line right to Lexstacy. Fast over the speed bumps KAWHUMP KAWBUMP on Buckman Road back to my abode. I immediately Google PRP, finding evidence, *holy shit*, that the treatment *does* work, at least for some:

We are entering into an era of biologic treatment, which is incredibly ideal, where you can use your own cells to try to help repair your other cells, rather than using a substance that is artificial," Dr. Halpern said. "The downside is next to zero and the upside is huge [must've been written pre-Trump]." Dr. Halpern pointed out, however, that the study is a small case series and PRP needs to be pitted against a traditionally treated group in a randomized, controlled trial.



"Two Tents" gets her blood drawn.

But I know for certain that my nemesis, Mr. Blood Phobia, like Doc Martin's in the TV series by the same name, will never release his grasp on my psyche to allow me to try it. Having my blood taken is tantamount to major heart surgery for me. I have my attorney redraw my will each time I need blood drawn.

The 1st time I get blood drawn

here, my cheery blood technician — a portly woman of Cherokee descent whose name tag reads Adsila (a Cherokee name meaning "Blossom") — good naturedly chides me that *my* tribal name should be "Two Tents". Why Noonie once called me that! Roll of the comic dice, that. I ask her how she got her name. "My pregnant mother was carrying me when a small boulder fell and rolled in her path, When she moved it out of her way, she saw a blossom beneath, fully intact, not crushed." I think about that: *The world is observable because it is unobservable*.

* * *

18.0

It's an ordinary day, when, ordinarily, nothing is happening and the coronavirus crisis announced hourly is now all too familiar and the politicos are declaring, yet again, that either: 1) without them there would be catastrophe; or, 2) there is no catastrophe.

This ordinary day, I stroll the Santa Fe Plaza. Masked people slowly pass each other, glances peeking out from behind the cloth checking out whether others are thinking the same thing: *So this is life!* They look like *zeks* in a Gulag. Some sport *red masks*, some are unmasked — usually youth. I imagine a scene from Poe's *The Masque of Red Death*: "And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all."

Why no mask?

I worry about you maskless humans. Born without a prefrontal lobe? Or testosterone poisoning, estrogen excess?

Well, lady, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I'm missing a cerebral cortex. No amygdala either. I can't do better.

And my mother always told me that my lock of a frontal cortex, means among its many tasks, I lack JUDG-MENT!

Right, man. ... empathy resides in part of your missing frontal lobe, the anterior insular cortex, in the supra marginal gyrus.

Risking manslaughter charges? Or maybe murder? Constitutional "rights" ahead of your life, my life, everyone you face, close-up, maskless.

So many untransplantable brain parts! What loss, oh clueless one, shriveling our world's union, its compassion.

Janet Eigner Santa Fe

From The Santa Fean (August 9, 2020)

I spy a bench beneath a tree with an abandoned copy of *The Santa Fean* newspaper resting thereon; it provides my hip relief. My gloved fingers grab the paper. I awkwardly paw to the Letters to the Editor section. Reading down, I find a witty dialogue by a woman whose last name translates from German as "owner". *I'm Janet and I* own *this message*.

I say an "ordinary day". But an ordinary day here means wide inescapable skies. Pure entertainment, the only entertainment now legally per-



mitted, and it's self-distancing. In the skies I can see vivid sunsets and sunrises, blushing at their naked glory, clouds from which emerge fast-moving rain squalls with their electric strands; they remain on stage only briefly. From my bench I see an intense blue field filled with clouds colliding, forming stuffed toy animals before my amazed eyes. *There's Snowy!* I see dogs more often than cats in these clouds. *Picky, when clouds start to look like Noonie's face, means ya been puttin' down too many Corpse Reviver#2 * cocktails per fish taco at Paloma's colorful outside dining area.*

* The Corpse Reviver #2 is rightfully considered by many to be the best-tasting of the Corpse Reviver cocktails. It's one of the staples at Chicago's gin-focused bar Scofflaw, where bar manager Luke DeYoung calls it "perfectly balanced, refreshing yet still strong. It's an iconic cocktail that won't go out of fashion any time soon."

1 oz. gin, 1 oz. Cointreau, 1 oz. Lillet Blanc, 1 oz. fresh lemon juice, 1 dash absinthe, garnish with orange peel.

I mention *zeks*. That's Russian slang for a slave laborer in a Gulag. So notes John Berger while formulating 2 equations comparing THEN and NOW.

Gulag: criminal = slave laborer

This, under the Trump administration, can be rewritten as:

Neo-liberalism: immigrant worker = latent criminal

The crime here? *Trying at all costs to survive*. Some 15 million of them try. Today, in the Plaza, I see such survivors sitting in place with jars waiting for the likes of me to place offerings therein. In the Plaza, *place* is both a noun and a verb.

Musing on my shady bench, greenery exploding around me — sadly, my Midwest friends think Santa Fe is desert-bleak like Arizona — I work up my own set of correlations, These thoughts pop into my *cabeza*:

Small commodities are increasingly difficult to remove from their packaging; market forces are inevitably stronger than any nation-state.

Military actions are now called 'policing'; policing is now increasing 'militaristic'.

Tyrants were once distant, inaccessible. No longer true; they are as close to us as our LCD screens and always say "We".

Opinion poles replace direction and replace desire; Native Americans live direction and desire.

Re: the protests: The "system" wants the poor to pillage the poor; often make it appear so (*agents provocateurs*). But new forms of solidarity pop up via interconnectivity.

People today are presented as "cowards, losers," only the "brave" are winners. No gifts, only prizes to be won.

In our global economy, only extracted resources count. As an old Navajo I met selling trinkets near the Plaza told me before the lockdown: "They cannot listen to the earth. On the ground they are blind." Meaning that Captains of Cyberspace, within the local, are lost. Native Americans always have been *in* the local.



I pull out my trusty iPhone, record a voice message so I can later retrieve these tidbits of insight. While recording that comment by the old Navajo, Mochni (Talking Bird), I flash on the whole Indian market scene which Noonie and I marveled at on our visit. Navajo and Hopi merchants sitting under a long porticos or tents on small stools, proposing nothing. Immobile, expressionless, relying on their own

simple presence alongside their wares as guarantee of the quality of the jewelry, bead work, leather, silverware, pottery, blankets, belts, and bolo ties spread out on blankets before them.

For us Anglos, life is carried out among relative strangers, lasting a few moments or months. We take on individual, independent histories; we are taught to be acutely aware of our individual existence — think Existentialism! — so much so that we have to work hard to maintain a sense of "community" in our lives. For Native Americans, like other small, stable societies, their culture frames a coherent network of time-enduring reciprocal relations within a cyclical concept of time. Ours is linear. Watching these Indian merchants, I sense their otherness to my own culture, yet, as a Jew, I can relate to the concept "tribe".

While I was talking notes into my phone, a solid-bodied man, in his late 60s I'd say from the just-turning-white hair poking out from under an expensive-looking cowboy hat, walks over from the famous Plaza Cafe and sits on a bench set at a right angle to mine. We are safely distanced, but close enough to chat if either of us wants to turn and start a conversation. As he sits his bulk down, his torso sags against his blue cotton shirt like a great udder and his red shorts rise above his knee to reveal middle-aged woman-like fleshy thighs. He has on leather sandals and white socks.

When he casually turns toward me, the gesture reveals a face larger than I expect. He wears no mask so I see a thick jaw, unshaven, deep lines bracketing eyes whose eyelids slightly droop. I take him to be a tourist from (eck!) Texas. Probably an unknowing servant of COVID XIX. I assume his wife is marching up and down Santa Fe's quaint streets, shopping *sans* mask for clothes and he's tired of schlepping his bulk about. I give the 2

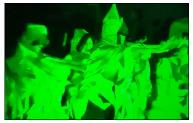
names — Ted and Evangeline — then lean back and delight myself by making up an origin story for them and what destiny holds in store:

In a Noonie-like roll of the cosmic dice, they both, unknown to each other, crash the 1973 Bread Loaf Writers' Conference: Bread Loaf Campus of Middlebury College in Ripton, Vermont, posing as kitchen staff. While washing dishes, they discover they are both devoted fans of Louis L'Amour western novels and each want to author a 'new take' on the Western novel. They crash a gathering of Conference members one evening. "Oh, we're not paying attendees!" the dishwashers gleefully respond to a question directed to them. "We're on the kitchen crew!" Later, they race back to the warren of rooms at the back of the Bread Loaf Inn where staff sleep, gather their belongings together, recall how the authors seated around them sat clutching their glasses of sherry or cups of tea, gaping soundlessly. "Fuck them! Ted, let's collaborate."

Eventually, they marry. Their dreams of becoming novelists are dashed after they take 3 Louis L'Armour novels, copping lines from each to create a single, new "Lovin' L'Armour" mash-up novel, but are sued by the original author. Destitute, they scrimp and save and finally start a successful business writing unusually effective ad copy for a wide range of western wear products. "We made a lot of dough in that niche market," recalls Evangeline.

In a magazine interview years later, Ted and Evangeline recall their initial meeting during what they term "Our Bread Loaf Adventure, The Dough Rises": "For us the magic of the Bread Loaf campus wasn't the view, but the way the landscape had been domesticated. The array of late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century buildings that dotted the enormous, carefully maintained meadow didn't scream wilderness by a long shot. They were more like some very wealthy child's discarded playhouses, and that's how our friends on the kitchen crew and we treated them. During our free time, we explored every floor and wing of the Inn and all the dormitories, taking advantage of any opportunity to peer into the paneled or papered bedrooms and the bathrooms filled with primitive plumbing. The Library, the Theater, the Barn that held a lounge and a snack bar, and the pond at the back of the campus were all our territory.

Nature turned into text. Next turned into matrimony; matrimony into forced parsimony, no money; we applied Occam's Razor to our life, saving until we could open our own business in Austin. The rest is . . . "



The Green Monsters of my sleep.

I fall asleep at this point — asleep, but my heart is awake — I probably snore. I dream of strange green figures in a dance that starts slowly, then accelerates to violent swaying. A strong gust of wind awakens me. Then, a sudden lull, the trees soughing. But then a scream of frightened leaves, again. I notice that the

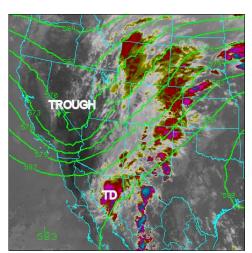


Byron Morton (Tintin lookalike).

adjacent bench with the Texan is empty and that a bird has dropped a white stain on my left blue jean leg. The Plaza is deserted. Staff at the Santa Fe Cafe have taken down the umbrellas shading the outside tables.

A gathering of dark clouds overhead confirm a rain squall is imminent, a "Recipe for Rain" as our Tintin look-alike weatherman, Bryon Morton, calls it. I awkwardly stand up and hip-hop, hip hurting, back to Lexstacy only to find she is wearing a new accessory, a pink parking ticket. As my steed and I make our way north down St. Francis Street toward the annoying speed bumps on Buckman Road, turning right at "The Tree of Life and Death" (a

tree half alive, half dead situated on a corner) heading home, a Biblical deluge buffets us. Nearly blinded by sheets of rain, I am lucky to make it back to feed the dogs. When I arrive, the street gutters are small rivers. Inside, the dogs are barking in fear.



Byron Morton's "Recipe for Rain" forecast.

An hour later. I am watching Bryon's (Tintin) weather report and eating water melon. He mentions that due to climate change the global "hot zone" is creeping yearly 12.5 miles north. Which means Santa Fe's average temperature will be like Albuquerque's now in about 5 years. Right now Santa Fe's summer temps runs about 6 - 10 degrees cooler than ABQ. When Noonie and I visited here 3 years ago, July's daily temp hovered around 85 deg. F. This July it was over 89 deg. F almost every day, with a stretch of 95 deg. F days tossed in for good measure.

Byron mentions the unprecedented fact that Rogers Park, Illinois, where Noonie and I

lived as kids, had a small tornado set down. Around my former home, trees were blown down. Chicago got blasted by severe winds just a day after the massive looting in the Loop. It looked like trees were put up against the wall and shot at dawn, bodies lying where they fell. The End of Days! For the 100th time, I thank the lucky toss of the cosmic dice that landed me here in the Land of Enchantment.

My home is not air-conditioned. Ceiling fans and standing fans do the trick. But will they in 5 years? I will be 81 by then. Probably have to move to an air-conditioned elder home. Five years. Five years to enjoy relative freedom, why these months of isolation are such a a bitter pill, COVID XIX reducing my chances of finding someone special and testing my existing relationships.

* *



Channel 7 News reports today's updated stats, proving we are, like a wagon train, surrounded by hostile forces. So close does death seem, along Guadalupe Street, some artist has collaged skeletons on the WALK signs.

Vitalina tweets me. She's promoting a new performance work to be podcast. "I've titled it *Ooo-Boo Raw*. Booked a room in La Fonda Hotel, where the Harvey Girls worked as staff at the turn of the century, and decorated it with additional Colonial Spanish accents. A Bible and a deck of playing cards rests on the bed stand. The *mis-en-scène* suggests the action takes place in the late-1890s. The video basically consists of a paid heterosexual encounter between a female *ventriloquist* dressed as a Harvey Girl (played by me).

"There is a soft knock on the room's door. A bulky actor made-up as Donald Trump dressed as a cowboy enters. Boos are heard. He's carrying *The Art of the Deal* in his right hand. Mumbled sounds of dickering. The 'deal' is made, artfully. 'Here's the money' — exaggeratedly large bills with his face on them are

put on top of the Bible — 'where's the honey?' He notices a mostly eaten Green Chili Burger on the night stand. *Con brio* he points to it, saying: 'In Paris we ate *brains* every night.' As she undresses, she accuses him of lying to her about the love nest they were to meet in last time they played the 2-backed beast: 'Our last rendezvous — well — looked like a dungeon disguised as a Presidential Library. You told me . . .'

"He replies, 'Why so *nasty*? If I never lied, I would be merely a railroad time-table.' He then chants: 'All the way from Philadelphia / On the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe /All aboard, All aboard. Chuga, chuga chuga woo woo Chuga, Chuga, Chuga woo woo.' 'His Pants' drops his pants. Canned laughter and OOOOs are heard. Just as the erotics amp up, the girl (me) throws her voice to make it sound as if a drunken pimp has come in threatening the verticality of her *john*'s 'Little Johnson'.



Promotional scene from Vitalina's podcast video *Ooo-Boo Raw.*

"Intimidated by the largely indecipherable rant of coming via ventriloquist, the Trump character jumps off the bed, exclaiming loudly, 'Shit, missy, you've made a HUUUGE mistake,' and hastily puts on his pants, grabs his cowboy hat and snakeskin boots, and skeedaddles out of the room in sock feet, his hair flying in disarray (see promo photo next page), leaving the door open. Down the hall you can hear him wailing in the distance: 'Nasty! Nasty!' HUUUGE Nasty!' as the camera

slowly zooms in on the book, *The Art of the Deal*, which the Trump character has forgotten in his haste. The camera backs off to record the hotel door slowly closing of its own accord, as if by magic. Canned boos are heard. A trumpet plays 'Taps' as the ventriloquist puts back on her staff uniform, takes the last trash bag from its box on her maintenance cart, crumples it up, and tosses it into that very bag after lining the hotel room's trash basket with it — *Fini*.

"What do you think, Picky? Like the trash bag, thing? A moral there? Philosophy? Sheer Alfred Jarry, though, huh?"



Portrait of a Young Woman (La Muta) Raphael. The ergon points to the parergon.

I'm speechless — er — fingerless. I can't type a reply. I want to type: *glib, implausible, moralistic*. Yet, that *is* what nonfiction is all about. So maybe this *isn't* fiction, for only in fiction do the facts have to *seem* plausible. I'm confused. I mean my "diary" you are reading is both plausible and not, right? Anyway, I merely reply to Vita: "Girl, a triumph, Trumpf! — you've trumped your previous fake Fake News." She'll get the point.

She does. She goes on to remark about my ongoing writing: "If I had to rename you, Picky, it would be 'La Muta'. Why? Why just look at Raphael's painting known by that name. The woman (the framed object or *ergon* as deconstructionist Jacques Derrida termed it) is pointing her left index finger at the painting's frame (what Derrida termed the *parergon*) foregrounding its status as a *repre*-

sentation. 'Heap PoMo'. Like your writing, Picky, which ain't the near-poetry of Amy Hempel, but your quasi-diary gives the bad news of the world somewhere to go; you tack it to the bulletin board of your heart, girl. Post Noonie, you had to find a shelter with pockets to live inside; and you did! Fighting what your mother laid on you, that "sublebrity" that became a voice inside you telling you were worthless and stupid and ugly. Your new house, your garden, your backyard with its Aspens filled with chirping birds dancing on its limbs whom you've made, along with your dogs, full citizens of the polity of The Peaceable Kingdom West, and your amazing writing project.

"I take each pocket-within-the pocket of your writing as a mad lovely visitor come to share my weekend. A lot of laughs, as in when you laugh too long — it translates into tears." *God*, I think. *Is she in Margaritaville, or what*? "Sneaky sentences, Picky, idiosyncratic detail, a pun here, a 1-liner there. LOL." Breathless and finger-quick, she skips to Mark and me: "Are you both in the same frame yet, dancing in each other's heads?"

A big coincidence! Yesterday Valentina asked on Zoom if Mark and I were "Dancing with stars in our eyes, a star being a dream of light from which a universe awakens." Dance. In ballet, it's the seed of the ankle from which the body grows, where recalcitrant muscles hold their unnatural own. A love of mine. As a young ballet student doing *piqué* turns (I almost titled this book *Piqué, Now It's Your Turn*) and *tour jetés* — which reminds me, Noonie dug Chris Marker's film *La Jetée*, a sort of "ballet" with turns and loops in Time.

Ballroom dancing with Noonie, I led, Noonie all antennae, fitting himself to my turns and dips, he enjoyed the active uncertainty following entailed, said it was as if he was "inside my whole body." In turn, I responded to his moves. It's like we were both reading the same poem, listening to our bodies, giving different interpretations. When I did ballet as a kid, I'd strike a pose and yell to my camera-toting mom, "Degas me, mommy."

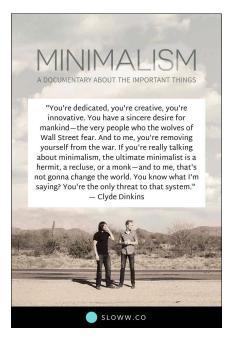
After our dancing, we *talked* about *romance*, *our joy*, *liberation*, but adjectives are inadequate to describing the *inside* of the experience, as we both knew. How can we know the dancer from the dance? (A dance instructor I knew had an answer that was right on point: "When the dancer farts.") And now, *sans* Noonie, I am just a solitary, sedentary member of the audience; my *sautés* have turned from the dance floor to my gas stove. But, knowing from experience what it *felt* like, I enjoy something deeper than most in the audience. They only *see* and provide adjectives.

If I can't attend dance events at the famous Lensic Theater here due to the lockdown, I can enjoy performances on TV and online, professional and amateur. I can still marvel over the human body in dance, its magnificent and ostentatious scorn. Six months into the lockdown and I've: 1) sat through almost every classic Hollywood dance movie made, the latest, *Chicago* (I refuse to re-watch *La La Land* due the mediocre dance performances by Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone); and, 2) seen almost every documentary on the great dancers, the latest being on Bob Fosse and Gwen Verdon.

I saw Verdon perform in person in NYC on Broadway as a little girl. Two redheads. Me and her. She and I. I imagined being her on stage. My idol. I named her "Gwendon"" contracting her full name into 1 delicious term. Dancing together, me dancing with a star. I can see my kid's fantasy even now. As if in a mirror. We are watching ourselves, watching ourselves dance side-by-side — that mirror, again.

My phone rings. It's Mark! "It's Mark, 😍 gotta sign off," I finger-tap to Vita, surprised I inserted that lovey-dovey emoji.

What was I thinking? Or, as Noonie would say when he fucked up, using German because of its "guttural aggressiveness" — *Was dachte ich?*



Before I sign-off, I tell Vita, "Ah, Mark soothes me wit his beef bourguignon voice; we now have pet names, too. As he boasted on Hinge.com that he would be at someone's 'Beck and call' and calls me every day, I've dubbed him "Call' and I've' become for him 'Beck'. Been keeping this hidden from my Diary until now, why you're only learning this, that we've been FaceTiming. Vita, he loves 'Ants-On-A-Log' — celery with crunchy peanut butter — as a snack. Me, too. Bye-bye."

Yes, Mark and I have come to the stage in our limited modes of communication where we are dying to visit each other's respective abode, yet must be satisfied with narrated iPad camera views of our personal haunts. Here's an example thereof.

BECK 'N CALL:

Call: I'm a Minimalist *[pans the room]*. Have you seen that documentary on Netflix, *Minimalism*?

Beck: Not yet; saw it listed [watching the camera scan nearly bare walls].

Call: Will send you a quote from the film. These two ex-Wall Street guys — Ryan Nicodemus and Joshua Fields Millburn (the guy has a weird head-shape) — proselytize at various venues, promoting their book, for a simplified life free of egregious consumerism. Think of those rude crowds on Black Friday. Those who think winning means dying with the most toys won't like this film, but should watch it.

Beck: Yah, Ugh! If only those people rushing stores were just as passionate about improving democracy and economic equality.

Call: But maybe the street protests are moving that way, Beck. The doors are opening not onto more TVs and iPhones, but onto social justice.

Beck: Touché. So aren't you devoid all stuff? I mean living out of a suitcase?

Call: Hey, those two dudes, while on their book tour, lived for three months out of one suitcase each! Let's go into my apartment's kitchen *[POV is toward the kitchen, moving in slowly.]* Here's where I prepare my special Boboli crust pizza. I get the crust from Trader Joe's who gets 'em from Bimbo Bakeries. Like the name, too. *[The lens reveals few kitchen machines, just a toaster, French press coffee carafe, a can opener, cookie jar, knife holder, that's it.]*

Beck: I love pizza. I have a kiva fireplace on my veranda which might make a good pizza oven. Well, as Noonie could testify if was still around, when we traveled with did so efficiently, but I did have to have my cosmetics, teeth maintenance equipment, special mirrors, various tricks for making me look fifty not seventy, special towels, yada, yada. Took an extra suitcase, it did. Yes, your kitchen seems efficient, organized, and uncrowded. Not like mine. My kitchen's island tends to trap

day-old mail, COVID masks, dog collars, hand sanitizers, scissors, box cutters, small garden clippers, pens, grocery lists, and oven mitts. 'Fraid you'll find it hard to look at. *Wow, am I glad I cleaned up things a bit today and that yesterday the 2 house cleaners spent 4 hours slaving here*.

Call: I won't be judgmental. Go ahead, it's your turn to play show and tell *[looking directly into the lens, sympathically]*.

Beck: Black anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston wrote about our "will to adorn," and I've followed that passion in the homes I've lived in. Embellishmentism, not Minimalism is my thing. You, where two photos on the wall might suffice, I would hang half a dozen [pans the iPad over a kitchen wall strewn with photos, shelves with Mexican pottery, and dog figurines]. In my Oak Park home had two calendars hanging side-by-side (different picture themes though). I can't help but decorate the decorations, too. A small twig or flower here, a dozen painted and glittered pine cones there [the camera move into the dining room, sweeping along a decorative runner on my dining table]. I pride myself in my ability to arrange an artful living space.

Call: Why do you think you prefer . . . is it a *horror vacui* or what? What some call kenophobia.

Beck: Oh, like some old boy friend named Ken traumatized me? No. It's a two-sided coin. **Call:** Like in a coin toss? *[He smiles broadly.]*

Beck: Like a coin by definition has to have both sides, right? Same for me. 1) Negatively, it's a form of resistance, a happy refusal to button up and followed the rules, probably a reaction



Venice Beach House (1984) Frank Gehry.



Ecologically-sound Earth Home, Taos, NM.

against my over-controlling mother and ex-husband; and, 2) Positively, its an expression of *Hygge*, a Danish and Norwegian term for a mood of coziness and comfortable conviviality. It did oft drive Noonie nuts. *I wonder if I should have confessed that*. He was more like you in regard to home furnishings. Had Cubism, the Bauhaus and Constructivism in his blood; liked Brut Architecture, too. Preferred architect Frank Gehry's earlier work, like the Venice Beach House, up to the Vitra Design Museum in the late-1980s. Nothing afterward. *[We are now looking into our respective iPads, directly into each others eyes.]*

Call: Me, too! The Venice Beach House. Sort of akin to stuff being built under the terms of the Tiny House Movement today. Some such homes were featured in that movie.

Beck: Couldn't imagine living in such, though. A few years back, Noonie and I went to see those Earth Homes in Taos. We both liked them, the ideas of sustainability expressed in their construction.

Call: I agree. Toured them awhile back. Impressive, if not perfect.

Beck: Have you ever read Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*?

Call: Some time back, Beck. But I recall some great material concerning doors, thresholds. Like: "The



Picky's front entry way.

door scents me, it hesitates." Love that! A quote from the poet Jean Pellerin, I think. You have to show me your entry way. Beckon your iPad thereto, my sweet. A threshold is most telling. It can repel or invite, beckon one on into the unknown.

Beck: Yes. Passages in that wonderful text, I can still hear them call to me, Call. The door schematizes, in dreams, two strong possibilities, OPEN OR CLOSED. Acceptance or repression.

Call: Marcel Duchamp's witty installation piece, *Door, 11 rue Larrey,* where a door is *both* open and closed, overcomes Aristotlean either/or logic. Very proto-PoMo.

Beck: Yah, Noonie dug that piece, too. I remember Bachelard writing: "A well-rooted house has to have a branch that is sensitive to the wind, or an attic that can hear the rustles of leaves." My old home in

Oak Park had those qualities in spades. Oh, what a dislocation of comfort it was to move. My solid fortress here against the weather in New Mexico is less romantic in that sense; the rustling here is more like a cocktail being shaken, not stirred, by gigantic hands. This retreat is such a different experience from my former home [a door opens, the lens moves through and turns 360 degrees about to reveal a front door and various decorative items flanking it]. Here, see what I did with the entry way.

Call: Wonderful touches. No, I mean it. Well-balanced, color scheme is perfect, Beck.

Beck: The Brut simplicity of this Pueblo Revival style beckons my will to adorn, fill it tastefully, in *my* taste, that is *[lens travels back inside the home and down the hall to the bedroom]*. *I wonder if I should being doing this, might give him risquée ideas. Do I want that?* Here, see what I've done with the master bedroom: matching dressers and bed stands, a very large clock, the king-size bed, my cousin's gorgeous watercolor . . . *[the lens pans around]*. Native Indian tchotchkes here and there, like a rattle, an arrow, a print of an Indian on a horse. A cowhide rug on the floor is the *coup de grâce*. Nice. But I often trip on it.

Call: I see plenty of knick-knacks on your dressers [*iPad pans quickly away, but then back again*].

Beck: Tasteful Indian pottery, a funky ceramic skull, local color to color the room, Call. *Do I sound too defensive? Relax.*

Call: What do you think of 'house museums'. *Trying to change the subject.* You know, someone of note dies and the residence is turned into a site for tourists. Either the house, or the creative work of the resident therein, becomes an intimate site to enjoy that person's contribution to culture. I think of the Barnes Museum before it moved.

Beck: Wow, yes, yes. I love them! Noonie and I went to the Barnes just before it was moved (eck!) downtown. In Europe, too. The Spanish painter Joaquin Sorolla's House in Madrid, was a fav of ours. Loved his paintings. The garden was amazing, too. *JiPads aimed at their faces.*]

Call: Yes, the advantage of seeing, feeling, the artist or writer's environment on their creativity. But during this pandemic, so many are losing the foundations that support them financially. Many will close permanently, I'm afraid.

Beck: Hope not. Loved Manuel de Falla's little nest in Granada. Such perfect decor. Like his music. Noonie went nuts when he saw the musician's old Remington. It was a tiny house. But nice decor. Not minimalist. Appropriate to the man and place.

Call: But your approach seems more 'recursive,' that 'decorating the decor' stuff.

Beck: I plead guilty, your honor.

Call: You are sentenced by COVID XIX to ...

Beck: Yah, sentenced to house arrest.

Call: Don't ya just hate this, Beck? And Trump's shenanigans, too. Nearly unbearable.

Beck: Why I want to hold hands. I want to dance. The membrane between us thin. The music calling to us, beckoning us onto the dance floor. Then the waiting, close, for the next dance to start. That wonderful moment. When listening is heightened, even as one's body is heightened to the presence of another. *Look what I'm actually saying!* I know the dance is in the delay, rhythm in the retard. *Is that PC, that word, or not? Noonie got busted for using it once.*

Call: Now you beckon me, huh? Sexy.

Beck: A new being. COVID XIX says 'TO BE OR NOT TO BE? THEN IT'S NOT TO BE.' I want to be. . . . [Annoying sounds of frustrated, hungry dogs in the background.] My dogs are calling out to me, beckoning me to feed them. Their chow-time is long overdue. Gotta sign off.

Call: Well, this has been a wonderful chit-chat, Beck. Touch base soon. Bye. [Blows a kiss.] **Beck:** Chiao [smooches, wrinkling her nose].

I close down my iPad, my fingers trembling slightly. I hold it with both hands in my lap, take some deep breaths until I calm down. *Did Beck think I'm a hoarder? Got too much inventory? I think his place is nice; an apartment demands restraint. If we do finally come to each other's homes, each will feel a relief from their usual environment, right? Change of context. Open each of us to new possibilities.*

This reverie is broken as the dogs' frustration amps up to the point where they are screaming in dog lingo. I run to feed them, favoring my bad hip. Gimp, gimp, gimp. I sense their gnawing hunger, soon to see their hunger gnawing. I have a different hunger. Until another hunger takes over. ME WANT FOOD.

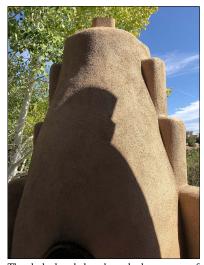
I fix my dinner. I made oven-roasted chicken yesterdy; now I cut it into small pieces and put them into a watermelon salad into which I've added: fresh watermelon, arugula, pine nuts, diced red onions, feta cheese, with a balsamic vinegar reduction dressing. Great. Cold green tea to drink. Smacking my lips, I get an idea, but after seeing 2 birds fly to my birdfeeder — I recognized them as "The Warbler Brothers" — I forget what it was.

The next door neighbor's Siamese cat, Princess Carolyn, has come into my yard and its trying to scamper up the Aspen tree's trunk to get at the birds. Snowy is instantly at the kitchen door barking at her Highness, so the cat hesitates. The neighbors have 2 cats. The other, Lingo-Bingo Boy, is male and was so named because he has an amazing range of odd types of meows that I've never heard come out of a cat's mouth. He even scares my dogs who are usually fearless. I don't complain because these "mousers" — I prefer the term "Killmouskies" — they keep the area free of mice.

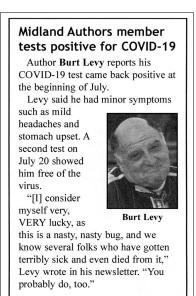
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In the Reign of COVID XIX: a hospital wedding.



The dark, hooded and masked presence of COVID XIX seen on my veranda.



Is a "hospital wedding" going to be Mark's and my fate? Ominous sign: on my veranda I see the dark shadow of roaming death cast onto my outdoor fireplace. This, after marching past Matt's Tesla—hearing him cough inside his condo — to mail box 5B, then opening my mail to find the August edition of the *Literary License* bulletin from The Society of Midland Authors, with a sad post about a member who got the coronavirus. The other envelopes are bills.

I feel very very vulnerable. The cities are now swollen and poisonous with unmasked people. When I sigh, it's like someone else sighing. As if I'm walking around naked. As if scorpions, tarantulas, and snakes were waiting at my front door, eager to be invited in. A terrible random energy seizes me now and then. When I look in my mirror, I see someone with the slowest smile of anyone I've ever seen, but whose eyes are nervously darting about. Sure, I can turn on the boobtube, but Mark reminded me: "Beck, do not beckon on to Sports, Fox News, and Religion, they are the 3 top passions of the poorly educated. Call me instead."

No. My only outlet for that energy appears to be: 1) exercising my *will to adorn*, me with fashion, my home with stuff; or 2) writing, but sometimes my mind turns to fuzz and I can't write, only mindlessly peruse Facebook posts of relatives and friends equally fuzzed out over being trapped in the same cage with those provocatives, the Immanent Baboon and His Evil Majesty COVID XIX.

Sometimes I can provoke my brain to puff out a page or 2 by imagining myself as a tree, multiple arms out to embrace the sky, the sun, any rain that might fall on my green tongues. Other times, I use artificially-induced laughter to get up steam, to get the ol' rusty wheels turning, my mind choo-chooing out of its dreary old depot onto new tracks and adventures. I want Mark to be a friendly conductor on that train, blowing through whistle-stops, headed for the Promised Land with its vast expanses, ever-changing mountain





Dumortierite from Noonie's gem collection. a rare blue/violet mineral occurring typically as needles and fibrous masses in gneiss and schist. It consists of an aluminum and iron borosilicate.

colors, yet the intimacy of bonnie brier bushes in every kailyard, the sun on a lake lingers like a peacock, glimmering gems pepper the landscape, hawks spiral above, tracing the geometry of the cosmos, tall, lush aspens with 100s of nightingales giving forth their 100s of different phrases with their mix of rhythmic chirps, spread out whistles, and funky contrasting noises — neither mellifluous nor melodious — yet delightful. Mythic birds / bards, long celebrated. My Promised Land where words leave the page, take on other meanings as if they had the right to be young again. "My appetite for life increases through the ardor of words," wrote Gaston Bachelard. Poets are nightingales and vice versa. This Land harbors poet-farmers, poet-tradesmen, poetsheep herders, poet-blacksmiths, and Noonie, who wears his anarchist's black T-shirt declaring: LOTH TO OBEY / LOTH TO COMMAND, and hunts gems.* Yes, this Land harbors companions from my past. An archive as well as wish list. At times these cheery inhabitants break out into verse, song,** or dance. My dreaming observation of a mysterious affinity between myself, Noonie, and that Land. A cosmic reverie. My anima dreaming deeply.

Opposed to my reverie is the mediascape with its incoherence, a wilderness of comparable

excitements, a frenzy depicting the world picture of globalization as a puzzle whose wretched pieces do not fit together. Waste products — immigrants, the homeless, the jobless, those with no money — are to be eliminated as greed replaces intelligence. We're in the midst of a "Fourth World War," as Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos nailed it so well.

Picky Hunting

* * *

** In French songeur means "dreaming," yet also harbors the English word song.

^{*} Noonie's attitude toward others was dictated by the desire to cause them as little trouble as possible. Stones seemed a good substitute for people. For Noonie *stone* was the essential element, not the heart. As a child, he collected rocks, breaking them open to see their inner marvels; as a teen, he learned chemistry and that rocks were chemical compositions; he longed to become a geologist. Then, during his hippy years, he got stoned. Even when a professor, he kept a special rock in his pants pocket, as this notebook entry reveals: "My foot caught on something, I nearly tripped. It was a small stone, a stone so strange in color and shape I just had to put it in my pocket to admire at leisure over and over. A good luck stone." Noonie often referred to people using geological terms: a nice person was "gneiss", a bad person, like Chad Armbuster, was "schist," and a boring person was "borosilicate.," or just a "boro".

19.0



Plato Looking in a Mirror (17th C.) Bernard Vaillant.



Post Master General Louis DeJoy to testify.



Smug U.S. Navy Seal Robert O'Neill, who says he killed Bin Laden, refuses to wear mask on Delta Airline Flight.

1500 C.E. Southern Germany. The world seemed about to end. Or so thought many. Fire and brimstone. There was the Black Plague, nomadic crowds scouring for food, revenge, bitter social conflicts, leading up to the devastating Peasants' War from 1524 to 1525. It failed because of intense opposition from the aristocracy, who slaughtered up to 100,000 of the 300,000 poorly armed peasants and farmers.

The 1650s, every city in early modern Europe suffered returning epidemics that could kill from 10-50% of a population. It's thought at least half the inhabitants of Naples — more than 200,000 people died of plague in 1656. Salvator Rosa's painting *The Frailty of Human Life* (c.1656) is a report from death's front line. It might seem the ultimate in macabre overstatement: a newborn baby writes an agreement with Death acknowledging that human existence is miserable and brief. Death is a terrifying skeleton with wings that loom up into the painting's sepulchral darkness. Rosa survived the 1656 plague but lost his young son, along with his brother and sister, her husband and 5 children.

2020 C.E. The worldwide pandemic. Death haunting the bars and large box stores. Bitter social conflict in the streets. Shots exchanged. Beatings. Vandalism. The U.S. Mail — once *Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds* now lagging behind in its duties courtesy of our antidemocratic Immanent Baboon.

And what am I doing? Staring in my mirror, again. A self-portrait. I look at myself without a trace of dissimulation. Like many philosophers painted by noted

artists. Fascinated by the possible selves I see there. I "look" in both the verb form and the noun: "I look at my look, checking myself out" before I go to eat at The Tea House on Canyon Road. I am going to meet Flo for breakfast — our respective tables 6 feet apart. Abe's hard of hearing and so is a no-go.

Not sure how it will work out, but it's better than sipping coffee alone, watching stats on KOAT on how many school kids are coming down with the virus, how many college parties *sans* masks occurred, how Trump sycophant Louis DeJoy is joyfully fucking up our mail-in ballot system, and how a Navy Seal hero says fuck you to his fellow passengers by refusing to wear a mask. So I go to hear Flo streaming information!

I'm hell bent for The Tea House's famous Norwegian Eggs Benedict, washed down with *cafe-au-lait* and good conversation. Lexstacy — my "horse's" name, a constant between the names of the locations I approach and those I leave behind — charges up winding Canyon Road at 15 m.p.h., up past shuttered galleries, restaurants building outdoor dining, and couples (some unmasked) walking dogs. Weather? Perfect. TEA HOUSE, the sign reads. Lex squeezes into the last parking spot in their dirt lot. I think *Tea House of the August Boom*, when I see all the bland Protestant license plates from (eck!) Texas. Lex nearly backs out, wanting to gallop back to her corral. For a moment horse and rider are in conflict. But Benedict beckons. I charge on. Report to the masked *maître d'* for seating.

Flo's at her table already, dressed like a tourist. Her face lights up at seeing me, pulls her mask down around her neck. I see her smile. Mine mirrors hers, but with mask on it can't be seen. My table is across from hers, officially distanced, we face other. Masked wait staff approach with menus; we order coffee. I know what I'm getting. Flo studies the menu, glancing up at me on occasion. The line of her mouth lis as transient as the silhouette of a bird in flight. A Latina Zorro in a toreador-cape red mask takes her order. My waiter, slim, tall, and deliciously gay, reminds me of "Sebastian" (Patrick Walshe McBride) on the BBC TV sleuth series "Shakespeare and Hathaway". My order taken, I unmask so as to be heard across the gulf between us, wait staff moving like billiard balls caroming off tables.

Picky: Flo! **Flo:** Picky! **Picky:** Perfect weather for this. **Flo:** Even perfecter. Picky. *[Lwa*]

Flo: Even perfecter, Picky. [I walk over to her (replacing my mask in position) and hand her a gift sack; she pulls out a gift sack from beneath her seat as well. We exchange. When we peek in, much to our surprise, we see we've each given each other the very same gift : a bottle of Santa Fe Spirits Wheeler's Western Dry Gin. Mine has a red bow on it, hers a green bow.]

Picky: Whoa! Mirroring, again. I've got this thing . . . [I return to my properly social distanced table.]

Flo: Pretty weird, huh?

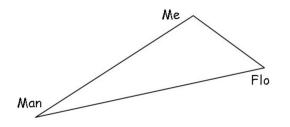
Picky: Yep.

Flo: Saw on the Santa Fe Bulletin Board the Leo New Moon is comin' up soon. Astrology's big here. Maybe you should ask Matt for a sunset spin in his red Tesla *[teasing tone]*.

Picky: [Diverting the topic, flashing on how her own son once "mooned" as opposing highschool team and got suspended]. Color is the place where our brain and the universe meet. Say, it looks like I got the last table.

From my table, I gaze across the empty space between us. Up to now, I've known Flo in 4 modalities: 1) pre-lock personal meetings; 2) FaceBook; 3) e-mails; and 4) FaceTime encounters. Now a 5th way: *intimate-distant*. A paradoxical category introduced during the Reign of COVID XIX in the Realm of Anxiety. Then I notice *him*. Or I should say his *eyes*. Funny how with masks on now, what takes immediate front-and-center is the person eyes, as if they are incorporeal. Recalls cartoons where characters in the dark move with sets of paired glowing eyes. Uncanny.

A beefy man in Casual Friday garb — potato brown pants, spade gray shirt — looks at us with the laser eyes of a hunter. Seeing nothing to desire, he ignores us. He is at the apex of what is, from our location, a right triangle:



His bearing — I'll call him "Roscoe" — is that of an important man (wealthy and/or powerful) like those seen in portraits of Dutch burghers from the 1600s. An urban face, experienced. He is *comblé*, both in the sense of being: 1) filled from breakfast and 2 Bloody Mary cocktails (glasses before him empty but for the celery sticks), but also in that; 2) he is "full" of himself. Alcohol's boosted his confidence, so he precariously tips his wrought iron chair back, daring the laws of physics as he does with economic laws when making tricky stock investments from his overstuffed office chair in his corner office overlooking Marcy Street downtown. He is studying a newspaper — I imagine it's the *New York Times* stock info — but it might as well have been a riding crop, given the way he handles it, rolling it up, swatting flies. When he puts the paper down, his visage bespeaks a "May all prosper!" look of blessing on all of us socially-distanced folk at the outdoor dining area. Thank you, Roscoe. Kind of personage Dutch artist Frans Hals would've loved to paint.

Drawing a line from Roscoe's sockless sandaled feet — a distinctive signature at the bottom of his body (like artist Mantegna, I am fixated on feet) — and extending it

backward so as to follow the angle of his body's backward lean, it begins a new triangle vertical to the triangular plane sketched above. If you haven't already guessed, in highschool I was a geometry whiz and always caught up in romantic triangles (the latter only in my teen imagination, of course). And, or course, being Jewish, I love 2 interwoven equilateral triangles.



Flo: We are the precipitates of what our parents couldn't forget [slowly shakes her head as if to deny the very concept she is asserting].

Picky: Now that is the crux of psychoanalysis, Flo.



Jerry Falwell, Jr. resigns from Liberty University.



Picky's Norwegian salmon eggs Benedict.

Flo: I learned that during my years with the Head Start program. Dealing with parents. And what a fuckin' *precipitate* that asshole Trump is, huh? His sister really has him nailed in her book.

Picky: Yah. Don't get me started. A sociopath. Jerry Falwell, Jr. dubbed him "The Blue Collar Billionaire" (BCB) during the 2016 election. As crude as his base but with bucks and balls to speak his prejudices without shame. Represents marginalized whites' dream of power by association.

Flo: And now Falwell, has fallen into the well of scandal. Ha! Yah, I'd like to skin that BCB alive. Abe told me that when you skin an animal, you touch the truth about flesh.

Picky: The only way, for sure, you'll ever get at the truth of Trump. Hung upside down like Mussolini and Marsyas in Titian's *The Flaying of Marsyas*. [My breakfast order sits before me, skinned Norwegian salmon, its bright flesh staring up at me, I flash on Marsyas, a satyr who rashly challenged the god Apollo to a musical contest and lost; next my mind darts to chef Bobby Flay, who turned 55 (ah, double quincunxes!) last December and Flay's delicious chicken and eggnog waffles. Food thoughts, get behind me!]

Flo: . SHHH, Picky, [nods her head in toward "Roscoe"] there are probably some fuckin' Always Trumpers here, girl. Keep your voice down.... You must like pineapple upside-down cake, my dear [winks]. Ah, thanks. [Her order of Confetti Eggs — steamed eggs, parmesan, scallion, tomato, and slice of toast with butter & jam arrives.] Beautiful! Love this place.

Picky: Oops. You just think *everyone* must see what a schmuck the Baboon is, so . . . By the way, Hillary Clinton was wrong. "Deplorables"? No. They are more aptly described as "The Duped." Sad to see people worship the very thing resulting in their economic subordination. The Wobblies must be turning in their graves.



RNC, Always Trumpers adoring their demagogue. The new fascist salute.

Flo: No doubt. By the way, why didn't you bring those cute doggies — Snowy and Duffy, right — with you? [Eager to change the subject.]

Picky: They'd keep wanting to run to your table, or follow the waiter around hoping some morsels would fall off the dishes. But, yes, I do like Santa Feans' love of dogs, their permissiveness concerning their presence

in stores and restaurants. Walking around here, well, its like being in a painting by Rubens, Veronese, Cranach, Van Dyck, or Velásquez where dogs are largely go-betweens between men and women wagging their elegant fans. [*Cuts into her eggs.*]

Flo: Bar none — as we say here — best way to meet a new partner, Picky. Walk those dogs around the Plaza. You know, you've trolled for large game fish, now seek new game using new lures like Hack Green Chile cologne, show a bit of cleavage [she quiets down to eat her steamed eggs].

Picky: That looks good [stabbing at her dish].

Flo: Hmmm [nodding an affirmative].

Picky: The Calabrian Chile Hollandaise sauce on my Benedict is like from another galaxy! Wow. Wow. Better than last time I had it, even.

Flo: It's nice when the future turns out better than the past. In cuisine that can happen.

Picky: The reverse, too. Like when your favorite place changes chefs and all your desired dishes turn to shit. In writing my quasi-diary, Flo, I realize nothing can take the past away. Noonie once told me the road already traveled curled up behind him, rolling up like 35mm film, which could be unrolled, a contact sheet printed, he choosing certain frames to print. Similarly, the past seems to be growing around me faster than ever. Maybe *because* I seek a new future!

Flo: Speaking of the future. Picky, I'm nervous. Abe is upset, too. This coming election. What if the future becomes even worse than the past several years have been? What then? [She reveals an expression of closed concentration, especially as seen in her eyes].



Mass protests, Belarus (2020).

Picky: People, if the Immanent Baboon refuses to leave office, will fill the streets like what's happening now in Belarus contra another fuckin' power monger.

Flo: Suppose. It might be bloody. Trump might call for rightwing militias, biker gangs, the KKK, to rise up; bring Federal troops in to quell ...

Picky: I remember those 250,00 nut-job bikers in South Dakota doing COVID's bidding.

Flo: God knows what

might happen if we have a Constitutional crisis.

Picky: Damn, Flo. Here we go again. We can't seem to get off political topics today.

Flo: Right. Your hair. Isn't it much longer? I like it. Back in the sixties I had long straight hair, as was the fashion. Had a mini-skirt, too.

Picky: Ditto on the hair. Spent hours brushing it. Noonie liked long hair on women, but understood the hassle of washing and combing it, et cetera. He eventually had his hair cut short. One of my son's has gone so far as to shave all his remaining hair off.

Flo: The Bruce Willis look, I suppose.

Picky: He was getting bald, so . . .



The Medio Fire (8/18/20) Picky Hunting.

"Sebastian": How is everything, m'am? [My "Sebastian" dopplegänger waiter interrupts. His tight-shirted torso sculpted from an ideal only 2 feet from my roving eyes]. We certainly appreciate your business during this difficult time.

Picky: Ah, excellent, sir. Another *cafe-aulait*, if you please.

Flo: Bit of a hunk, huh? Nice pick if you want a fling, girl. [She's noticed my appreciative glance at Sebastian].

Picky: Noonie always kept in shape. Looked much younger than his age. His father did, too.

Flo: Good genes, I guess. Not me. [Staff come out of the restaurant and point northward, anxious talk]. Wonder what's up? I see smoke, Picky! Like an A-bomb.

"Sebastian": M'am, a fire. Radio said it

was up five miles north of the Santa Fe ski Basin just off the Rio en Medio Trail in the Española Ranger District. Two miles east of the Nambé Reservoir.

Picky: Terrible. The fires this summer have been so catastrophic. And then that derecho in Iowa.

Flo: Yah, Destructive fire and water. Doomsday, crap. What's next — a comet? **Picky:** An ELE. Jeeze.

Flo: What?

Picky: Extinction Level Event. Remember that movie ... ah ...

Flo: Deep Impact. Yah. People started naming their kids "Ellie" after the film came out.

Picky: Talking about terrible events, the Indian artifact store, Silver Coyote near the Plaza, downtown was vandalized a few days ago. White Supremacists — the owner is from the Middle East — broke his front windows and tossed white paint onto his glass display cases of Indian artifacts.

Flo: Little fucks! As if the attack on that Indian restaurant a few weeks ago wasn't enough, huh? And I think there was yet another attack, too. Can't keep up.

Picky: And I thought by moving here I was escaping all that hate. The Immanent Baboon has his flock of chumps out there stirring up trouble. On horseback and in trucks.

Flo: You probably don't know about this, but back in 2010 there was a notorious hate incident involving two Farmington *[New Mexico]* men who beat, branded with a swastika, and wrote the words "KKK" and "White Power" on a developmentally-disabled Navajo man. Imagine!

Picky: Shit, Flo! My God [putting her napkin over her mouth].

Flo: Yah, and that was *before* El Trumpo came on the scene. Abe gets pissed — remember he was with the ACLU — when I say all people convicted of a hate crime should be sent to a special facility overseen by people of color; there they should be made to do hard labor, like moving cannon balls from one stack to another every day, back and forth for five years minimum. Every Saturday evening, a guard would come to their cells before lights out and toss a quart of black paint on them so they could spend their Sunday rest scrubbing the goo off themselves.

Picky: Nope, that ain't gonna fly, girl [waving my arms].

Flo: Abe gets real nervous when I tell him: "Abe, there's the Law, then there's Justice." **Picky:** Uhhh . . . yes, he probably would [*getting uncomfortable with the topic*].

I ICKy. Ommin... yes, he probably would [genning unconjornable with the topic].

Flo: You want to order dessert? Ginger bread served with lemon curd and whipped cream is nice. Wanna go order mo' joe and go with the Flo?

Picky: No! I'm on Weight Watchers. Can't. But could use more caffeine. Didn't sleep well last night. *[Hails wait staff.]*

Flo: I gotta have it. I didn't have my usual pre-breakfast Apricot Almond Twist *[she waves her hand for service]*. Ever have that pastry here? It is a record breaker. In fact, when you do your dog walk, man-lure stroll around the Plaza, take a dozen Apricot Almond Twists with you. See what happens! No single man over retirement age can resist a dog *plus* a pastry. Of course, you won't be able to do that until a vaccine comes out.

Picky: All they'd see now would be "Typhoid Mary" 'n ass 'n elbows it away from me.

Flo: By the way, didn't you mention the other day a guy named Mark?

Picky: We had our initial FaceTime session. We really hit it off. He's a bit of neatnik, but so was my Noonie. I know I can be a house-slob. Noonie kept my house from overwhelming me and loosened up his will-to-tidy a bit.

Flo: Convergence, then.

Picky: Yes. A relationship starts as a square and bends toward an apex until, ideally, one arrives at an isosceles triangle, or even better, an equilateral, 2 people heading toward that convergence point, the apex. Over the years, Noonie and I shaped an isosceles figure.

Flo: Nicely put, Euclid.



Signs, Guadalupe Street, Santa Fe, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.

Picky: Ya *clould* say that [wink-ing].

Flo: Ha-ha. Speaking of topologies . . . you've been out to Bandelier National Monument, right?

Picky: Yes, with Noonie back when. Amazing place. The ride there is as spectacular as the canyon itself. I am constantly surprised by nature here.

Flo: So you recall that overlook onto the huge basin created by supereruption, Valles Caldera. There're about one thousand volcanoes in New Mexico.

Picky: And Frijoles Canyon, for sure. Cosmic! My previous experience with landscape hasn't prepared me to comprehend New Mexico's.

Flo: We're still living with those events [grabs purse, puts on lip-stick].

Picky: A common constant background, which clever critic John Berger dubbed a landscape's *address*, the way a landscape's character determines

the imagination of those born within it. [Gets the "Lipstick-Let's-Go" hint, waves "Sebastian" over for the check.] La Cuenta, por favor. [He nods his head and bows slightly.]

Flo: Why the Native Americans here have such a deep connection, seem part of the landscape, while us newbies remain skittering on the surface, so to speak. For us Anglos, the rivers are enemies rather than allies. For some nine months they're dried up ravines, obstacles, for two months they're wild, destructive torrents. To really *see* this landscape we need new eyes

Picky: Well put. Our signs are on top of that landscape, not so much in it.

Flo: Thanks [said to the female Zorro who has brought over the check].

Picky: I will keep you updated on Mark and me.

Flo: Good. And don't forget that the Leo New Moon might be a propitious time to push your relationship further.

Picky: That sounds like a great Navajo name, Leo New Moon. I noted that a Washington, D.C. astrologer wrote in her blog: "Leo New Moon antithetical to the Immanent Baboon."

Flo: We wish. Did you see the new stats on the news this morning? Navajo Nation has become a model for superior coronavirus containment.



Picky: I recall that we had over 10,000 recoveries. Small number of new cases, too.

Flo: Something like that. It'd be lower if these maskless jerks from Texas and Arizona went home *[lowering her voice, nodding about at the others seated around us].*

Picky: And all those mass partying college students. Italy's governor of Campania threatened such students with "Carabinieri with flame-throwers." I have

little patience with the "untorn" who haven't weathered life's storms, all shined up on the outside, wiggling their dance asses, ignoring the threat they present to others. The old hippies had concern, had love. Noonie witnessed it, lived near Frisco during the those crazy acid-rocked glorious Haight-Ashbury days, when LSD didn't refer to Lake Shore Drive.

Flo: And those damned church groups! Scores of people unmasked, unsocial distanced. What Would Jesus Do? [She raises her hands high in the air.]

Picky: I can tell you. He'd direct them to the Bible, read St. Luke on Christ at the Mount of Olives where he safe-distances himself from his companions: "And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed . . ."

Flo: Ha! That'd get them! But then some wit would simply recite: "Let you who are of no sin, cast the first stone." Or something like that.

Picky: Moreover, those students should be made to attend Zoom conferences about the Black Plague when hospital beds, if you can call them that, were simultaneously occupied by three people: 1 sick, 1 dying, 1 dead. In Venice alone in 1575 nearly a third of the population died. Add on the curriculum the 1918 Spanish flu, and see if . . .

Flo: They are ignorant of such history and indifferent to the present. Paradoxically, they are trying to escape *from* freedom.

Picky: Each student seems to be living only in his or her corporeal space, numb to larger issues. I think they see their eyes locked behind a mask as possible peepholes looking back from eternity. By not donning masks, they are "masking" their fear and uncertainty.

Flo: Interesting point. We forget they *are* suffering; it creates a barrier to spirit, you know, suffering. I've seen it. It promotes resistence to will.

Picky: I hadn't thought of that. Yet these times are so . . . well . . . apocalyptic. J. M. W. Turner would be the perfect artist to capture the storms and fires sweeping our land. He visualized us as dwarfed by immense forces. An old friend of Noonie's who lives near those Northern California wildfires started by thousands of lightning strikes wrote me: "What the fuck is next: flying frogs?"



TV pals on "The Cisco Kid". 1950s racial stereotyping.

Flo: I think he meant a deluge of frogs. Anyway, yes, Picky, we seem fated to grow old in a climate of economic fanaticism, human indifference, violence. *Downs her dessert.*] By the way, how's your continual struggle with the vertical — your seed planting — going?

Picky: Garden is at its best right now. Perfect!Flo: One thing to be grateful, at least.Picky: Hey, Cisco, let's *went*! [*Pointing to her watch.*]

Flo: Okay, Pancho. [Begins to gather her purse.]

Picky: Kid-Ding me, huh? [As Flo climbs out of her chair and turns, I see the back of Flo's left knee. The love for our friends begins with creative attention, right? And so I think: The back of her left knee is really something! I will use this in my diary for sure.] Exeunt.

On the way home along Buckman Road, I see a gnarled piñon standing in darkbarked elegance gesturing toward my destination, steady even in the brisk wind. Once at my computer, I see Valentina's sent me an e-mail titled "What About Bob?" reminding me of my forthcoming hair appointment and attaches the following disturbing image:



She attaches a pdf document "for your spiritual benefit" about an astrological event:

The Leo New Moon on August 18 -19, 2020, sends beams of creative energy, reminding us to not lose hope in what we can achieve for the remainder of this year. Leo New Moon Protection Ritual August 2020: In this ritual, you will be guided to set intentions for what you wish to draw into your life using the magic of intention. This ritual is best done between August 17-August 28, 2020. You will need: Aura cleansing tool of choice (e.g., Kate's Magik Aura Mist spray). Candle, paints, or colored pencils/pens Paper cut into three squares (if you are using paint, use thicker paper) **Directions:** 1) Cleanse your aura using your tool of choice, and then your surroundings. When cleansing your surroundings, be sure you have a door or window open so the denser energies can leave. 2) Next, do a guided meditation of choice. It will also help open your energy centers to increase the power of your intention setting. 3) After your meditation, light your candle or incense and grab your paper and colored pens. Think about three things you would like to manifest or create in your life. 4) Take your first square of paper and using your colored pens, begin drawing a symbol to represent what it is that you would like to manifest. As you create your symbol, infuse it with the vibration of your first intention. Keep focusing on your intention as you draw, chanting it on repeat in your mind. Allow your creativity to guide you, there is no wrong way to do this! Your symbols can be as unique as you like.

She elucidates: "The New Moon in Leo is stimulating to creativity. You have the ability to create something out of nothing. The imagination is the spawning ground of the new world you wish to create. It is the source for ideas that grow into material existence. Go girl!"

She writes about a new customer. "This guy walks in with lawless hair, marred by uneven snipping around the edges. The guy tried to cut his own hair. A disaster, Picky. A 'hairdon't' that in the salon biz we call 'barbicide'. I had to buzz-cut his black hair back to almost nothing — like your dog groomer had to do with your black Scottie — to save his looks, which now looks like Bruce Willis. BTW, heard via the salon's grapevine that barbicide is becoming more common these awful days as if your majesty COVID XIX has decreed shaved heads be the official hairdo. DON'T DECIDE ON BARBICIDE. SEE YOUR HAIR PROFESSIONAL reads an ad on the Salon Owners Association website."

Ding goes my computer. It's an e-mail from Vitalina. That makes 2 people now begging for my online presence. "Picky, Picky — wow — thanks for that book [*The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*]! See the latest outrage? Another black man shot by a racist cop; blatant attempted murder! BTW, been reading Marxist art critic John Berger and found this super apt quote elucidating our dilemma in these days of dark despair":

Between the experience of living a normal life at this moment on the planet and the public narratives being offered to give a sense to that life, the empty space, the gap, is enormous. The desolation lies there, not in the facts. This is why a third of the French population are ready to listen to Le Pen.

This citation is followed by: "You know French, Picky. Isn't Le Pen a weird name? I mean the English word *pen* in French translates as *le stylo*. Does this mean Le Pen has 'style' or that he is a klepto? Just wonderin', kiddo. Or is it that English is being adopted into French, like *le hot dog*— what say?"

I thought for a second to reply to Vita, something about that conservative kook *Pence*, his name sounding like the plural of *pen*; that I call our lackluster V. P. "Pig Pence". But thought it better to spare you, Dear Reader, of such nonsense. Now if I was writing Noonie . . .



Good ol' hubby, he instinctively loved puns and hated the false elegance of the *beau monde*. Something that endeared him to me from the very start. Noonie, oh would he have danced a jig upon hearing Trump's Fascist Friend Steve Bannon was just snagged on running a scam with We Build The Wall money culled from duped right-wingers. Such good news. Perfect timing for the election. When I took the above photo off TV, I

was taken by the marked similarity in these thieves' profiles, those hairdos. I imagine their egos demanding a coin minted with their respective profiles on each side. A trick 2-headed fasci-coin minted in gold with no true tales to tell. An American Mint collectors' item. I was about to put my computer into sleep mode; about to flow into the dailiness of

life — not to be confused the corrupt Daley Family get Friend Request from dating site. I hadn't shu



Darryl C.'s profile photo.

life — not to be confused with Chicago's long political run of the corrupt Daley Family in public office when — DING! — I get Friend Request from Darryl C. from the OurTime.com dating site. I hadn't shut down my listing there. I go to his profile page. Kind of handsome man, but what is he doing in that photo? Coughing, Sneezing? Choking? Clearing his throat? Yawning? Wiping his mouth? Responding with shock to something he sees? At first this annoys me. But then notice it's the sort of "ambiguity" thing that Noonie might pull: a multiple

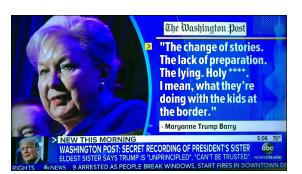
choice question posed in relationship to a photo. But, then again, this guy ain't Noonie. So ... what? Then I notice his posting: "Ladies, the first to correctly identify what I am doing in this photograph will be my first choice to take for elegant dining at The Compound restaurant's patio space on Canyon Road. Dom Pérignon champagne will flow and you will glow." His profile informs me: "Divorced, retired periodontist. I'm a casual guy who wants to jaw with an intelligent, perceptive woman over 60, over fine cuisine (socially-distanced, natch). Ladies with the first name of Carrie or Flossy, need not apply. Do you like to chew gum? So do I! BTW I drive a red BMW convertible, live in a splendid home perched in the hills above Santa Fe, and can assure you the word CHARMING will find its way into my obituary."



David Muir, newscaster.

I hate guys who dangle money before women's faces, thinking that's *all* we want is a sugar daddy. But the photo contest idea is unique, must say. And I do love the Halibut as served at The Compound. Best I've ever had. Great cocktails, too. But I don't accept his friend request.

I spend several hours in my office paying bills, catching up with this diary, editing photos in Photoshop. Finally, I shut down my office and proceed, dogs following, to the TV room to see what new outrages the



Maryanne Trump's recording.



Latest Worldwide Covid Stats.

Immanent Baboon has perpetrated today. David Muir's face appears. He has a strange twist to his mouth and his nose seems bent to his left. I keep wanting to push them into proper alignment. The news is good! Delighted to see that Maryanne Trump Barry's secret recording has surfaced, denouncing her brother's narcissism, his cruelty. But that bit of cheer is followed by news that the nearby Medio fire is still burning, then the awful worldwide coronavirus stats appear before me. I bend down and pick up sweet little Snowy and hug her close, thinking: It is astonishing I'm still alive, Snowy. Protect me. Duffy lets loose with a howl of what seems sheer existential pain.

* * *

20.0



The City (1919) Ferdinand Léger.

French artist Ferdinand Léger. Cubism meets technology. His subjects are objects, even the people he paints. Nice to escape works steeped in psychoanalysis. I like his work very much. When I look at his painting *The City*, I see the modern age's restless energy. The symphony of a city with its girders and grids, stairs and stares, posters and people. I look at this painting and hear him remarking: "We must create a society without frenzy, a society that is calm and ordered, that knows how to live naturally within the

Beautiful . . . we are going towards it; we must bend efforts towards that goal." After the devastation of World War I, it seemed necessary to envision a new future and technology seemed essential to that better future. Also, witness the 1939 N.Y. World's Fair's theme "The World of Tomorrow" on the eve of World War II. What would people have done had they been able to see what Tomorrow Land would actually become: The New World Order?

I would love living in a society without frenzy, living in harmony with nature. It is not just Léger's vision but, minus the mechanical technology, the Hopi's as well. The closest I've come to feeling this connection before coming here was my annual fishing trip (over a period of 40 years) to Wisconsin's Boyd's Mason Lake Resort where I'd stand and dexterously cast like a master, with panache, that quality of gesture that Noonie admired as he watched me tease the game fish to my lure. All the while soaking in the northwoods experience of deer and bears, happy children, the jawin' of fishermen after the day's catch, bemoaning the Big One that threw the hook, those stunning sunsets, and scrumptious country-style dining with people whose families have come there for generations.

But we now suffer the unnecessary cop shooting of Jacob S. Blake, a 29-year-old African-American, who was blasted from behind in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Seven shots. A sharing of pain, a precondition for dignity and hope leading to a frenzy of violent protests when the cop isn't immediately arrested. No justice, no peace. No calm. I think again of Noonie's prescient vision of America in his image *This Is Your Future* (see page 188).

I sit watching David Muir's news program: the 2 hurricane's headed for Texas and Louisiana; the Blake shooting, Trump at lectern, flanked by paired eagles referencing the German Imperial Eagle (*Reichsadler*), a Nazi symbol, heading for Kenosha; the RNC (Racist National Convention) with Melania Trump in quasi-military dress, standing before American flags arrayed so as to appear like the jagged forms of the Waffen SS insignia. Her crazy eyes belie any human feeling, avowing that Trump has done a superb job in fighting



Melania Trump looking like a female Fidel Castro. Flags in the background arrayed to recall Waffen SS insignia.

the coronavirus et cetera. More lies and more lies, li

hear the rousing Waffen SS song passing through the gobsmacked crowd to the click of iPhone cameras:



Waffen SS Insignia.

Gloria, gloria, Sieg heil! sieg heil! Viktoria! Sieg heil! viktoria!



Paired eagles flanking Trump reference the German Imperial Eagle (*Reichsadler*), a Nazi symbol.



More Nazi symbology in Trump campaign.

I think I've hinted at the fact that almost every morning, I spend hours at my mirror, at toilette. *I dress for paradise*. Same attitude toward my cooking. What a deft Benihana chef does with his trained hands, I do with my cuisinal mind.

I turn off the news in disgust. I need a frabjous supper as an anodyne to the shit coming out of the Baboon's mouth. I take out a stainless steel bowl. It is a chef's version of a fortune-teller's crystal ball. A strong glint from the reflected sun is a signal hailing from its polished concave interior: *Hi! Use me. Prepare a new recipe*, *Picky. Remember, WWND?*

Okay! Have you, Dear Reader, ever heard of serving Halibut with sautéed peaches? Probably not. I didn't. Yes, What would Noonie do (WWND)? Ah, —



BINGO! — peaches and puns come to mind: "Just for the Peachy Halibut" I will try sautéed peaches in butter, with some sugar free maple syrup, cinnamon, nutmeg, cayenne pepper, sprinkled with Meyer lemon juice. A chunk of Halibut is prepared by dipping in panko bread crumbs, brushing with syrup and cooking to form a nice light crust; add a touch of lemon juice and serve with steamed broccoli, garnish with a Meyer lemon slice. A very peachy

keen combination to sweeten the bitter feelings tasted during the RNC rally, consumed on my charming red brick veranda with Duffy and Snowy present but, sadly, the wondrous Sangre de Cristos marked absent due to the Medio Fire's thick smoke.



The Sangre de Cristos vanish due to smoke (August 2020).

Oh, those enigmatic mountains! They take on so many qualities of color and meaning, not just each day, but several times during the day. To not see them is like missing a good friend who has been unthinkably tender to me. Many times these hills appear to be like large waves from a petrified sea. I rejoice in the fact that within a half hour, if I desire, I can be cruising among them in Lexstacy. Imagine the history that these mountains have witnessed. But, for me, they also portend something to come. Part of the reason I

can't stop watching them. They dominate partner with, cooperate with, the territory below them to make what Santa Fe *is*. My thoughts wander, recalling a drive with Noonie through those mountains a few years ago; ah, his expressions of delight matching mine. Our emotional clocks synchronized.

Suddenly I notice it is getting dark out. I have been enjoying the slowly mutating yellows, reds, blues of a New Mexican sunset play on my optic nerve like the delicious cuisine just eaten played on my taste buds. The red orange of my Aperol Spritz, its complex, pleasant taste, echoes the waning sun-joys.

Viva La Vida! I am comfy on my chaise with Duffy and Snowy flanking me like those Lions in front of the Art Institute of Chicago. They silently commune with the smells and sounds of another night stealthily approaching. Suddenly they're up at attention — a coyote howling from afar. A snippet from a poem by Mahmoud Darwish pops into my thoughts just as I struggle up to go in for the night:

When my words turned honey / Flies covered my lips.



KOAT news. Breaking news. Satellite views. Category 4 Hurricane Laura approaches Louisiana.

Ana it ain't gonna be good, girl. A sort of Brobdingnagian coronavirus, spreading, attacking our country. How can I sleep tonight knowing that around midnight this angry monster will be beating, killing and drowning my fellow citizens?

Virus deaths spiraling upward, ram-

paging fires, devastating floods, a succession of tropical storms lining up to target the Gulf, the unrighteous Right calling all "normal" people subversive liberals — what else can we expect to torment us? A deluge of frogs as my friend suggested? Hoards of soldier ants attacking as in Carl Stephenson's "Leiningen versus the Ants" (1938)? Comet C/2020 F3 (NEOWISE) just missed earth, so we dodged an E.L.E. (I am sure some would welcome this apocalyptic event.) The next disaster? Will be the Immanent Baboon and his zookeepers reelection, opening the cages of the fascist lions and tigers upon us. I'm hoarding my Xanax pills.

Lying in bed, I mentally run through what to do tomorrow; my house suffers 2 problems: 1) at night pack rats chew garden plants, leaving what Noonie called "puckies" all over my veranda, the wind blowing them into small piles against the house. My neighbor Ichika swears by Bob Cat Urine spray: "Spray it all around base of your home and your problem go vanish like the Sangre de Cristos have"; 2) an invasion of squads of ants foraging for sustenance in my kitchen, streaming from cracks in my brick floor.

Ants hate me — they must think I'm Leiningen — and I them. I walk the dogs on a glorious morning and come upon a pile of dirt from which a long stream of very active ants (Tetramorium caespitum) flow. When the doggies seem about to put their vulnerable noses to the nest, I step on the colony and squish many foraging ants. One soldier ant (a microman with a long gun) manages to clamber up my version of a militia shoe, hop on my upper foot, and bite me right through my sock where my leg meets my foot. It HURTS! A small point of fire to skin. Then I feel the poison spreading. It still hurts, swollen. It was a moment which ousted all preceding and following moments. I imagine that Valentina would shame me for it. "Bad, bad karma, Picky!" I am not going to mention it to her. I wonder, What would Mark say (WWMS)? Say,

it might be an effective way to gauge his attitudes toward nature, toward me. I decide to FaceTime him tomorrow.

I let Duffy and Snowy sleep with me. I fear bad dreams and I am right, a vision right out of Stephenson's story haunts me:

I am in my kitchen to prepare breakfast. Looking out my north window I see a miles long, two miles wide column of marching ants, nothing but ants! Soldier ants, coming directly at me. Up and down the low hills of Aldea they come. Plants in their way vanish to sounds of gnawing, rabbits are running toward my property, away from the advancing ants. Ants, every single one of them a fiend from hell. From what I just saw, they appear to be able to devour a full-grown buffalo to the bones in minutes. I tell myself, "Picky, you if you don't clear out at once there'll he nothing left of you and your dogs but a skeletons picked as clean as the ribs you had for dinner a week ago." I have no water moat. Or rampart of gasoline ready to light. No workers to assist me in my defense in holding these horrors back. But I remembered: Picky! Focus! You have Bob Cat Urine spray and pellets. They're to my garage, retrieve the repellents I use on rats and mice. Hashem, please make it work! I dash about outside alternately frantically spraying and watching over my shoulder as the column of doom gets closer and closer. I experience the sheer horror of thinking I will soon be drowning in ants, bitten like in my foot, but all over my body. Pins of fire everywhere on me. When I've covered the perimeter of my property I retreat into my bed and huddle with the dogs under the covers. Somehow I see ants start breaching my veranda wall and move toward my kitchen door. Abruptly they stop, circle in confusion, pile up on on top of the other, crushing the ants at the lowest level. The odor of a feline enemy, these defensive weapons, stop the marauding horde and they retreat in confusion, leaving scores of their crushed behind.



When I do awake. I am all tangled in my bed sheets, the dogs are growling to be let out. I raise the bedroom window curtain and see . . . NO ANTS. I let the dogs out to do their business. When I open that door, a cool breeze plays on my legs. It is slightly overcast from rain last night. The sky is lilac gray like a pigeon feather with areas of pale cerulean blue of a gas flame dabbed with strokes of

snot titanium white. Nobody looks up at the sky without making a wish: *Hope it's going to be a pleasant day today*. It is the day of the massive march to celebrate the historical march for civil rights made by Martin Luther King on Washington back on August 28, 1963.

* *



Steve Fletcher's ceramic plate.

GMA reporters are reveling over the postconvention polling stats comparing Biden and Trump. But 45 + 31% only adds up to 76%. What the hell goes with the other 74% of voters? Refuse to participate in the survey? Sheer apathy? Still undecided at this point? WTF? Those stats should read: 69% to 31%.

More violence in Portland. Gun wielding militia-types. Deaths. The kind of chaos that serves the Baboon's purposes. Similar unrest was unleashed in the streets of Germany and aided the ascent of Hitler to power which led to the Nazi soldier ants overrunning Europe. Trump trying to curtail insight into foreign meddling with our forthcoming election: "The nation's top intelligence official [appointed by Trump] has informed Congress that his office will no longer give in-person election security briefings on Capitol Hill, a move that raised concern among lawmakers Saturday about the public's right to know about foreign interference in the upcoming presidential election." Yes, everyday another outrage.

Oh, Noonie. I am so glad you don't have to sit through such worrying news.

Okay. My mind seems to follow the Noonie track when 1 of 2 things occur: 1) disturbing political news; and, 2) I think of Mark. Today *both* happen to occur. I vowed to FaceTime him today. But, instead, I am

standing in the kitchen with my empty breakfast plate, staring at Steve Fletcher's ceramic plate which we commissioned to celebrate our love, in which we hold another similar dish celebrating love which I had already hanging on my kitchen wall. Noonie dug the meta-level reference, like heraldry: image-within-image.

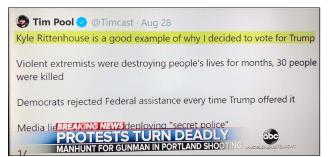
Noonie. When he came into my life he came on and spoke like a newly arrived messenger from elsewhere. His company was provocative, disconcerting at times, but always illuminating, often very funny. He was the 1st man I knew who had a *studio*. He told me he always sought basements for his studio because of its deep enclosure: "It is a place



Portland protest, pro-Trump supporters attack protesters.



No authority dreams of justice: Trump supports pro-Trump, anti-Black Lives Matter, hooligans.



Tim Pool (as does Trump) supports Kenosha militia shooter Kyle Rittenhouse and Trump.

the flavor of garlic or sugar, the smell of mussels."

Noonie hated America's lack of love. Love — it was shown on TV, in the movies, spread globally via emoji. But it isn't real. *Faux amour*. Love as investment — to invest is to hope for gain. Love of country, patriotism — translates as HATE. Instead of hating what we Americans have become, we're directed to direct our hate outwards. Every government survives on encouraging such hate.

John Berger wrote: "The present period of history is one of the Wall." This comment made prior to Trump's Border Wall. Berger refers to concrete walls, bureaucratic

of digestion, transformation, and excretion — *a stomach*." I laughed. Asked him if that's why he used so many colons and semicolons in his writing. Alas, when Noonie died, he took with him the secret which allowed him and only him to live a life of the spirit, a spirit that I fear I won't ever find again in a man. *Do I fear Mark might be that man?* Is that why I find myself inserting so much about Noonie in this collection of meditations?

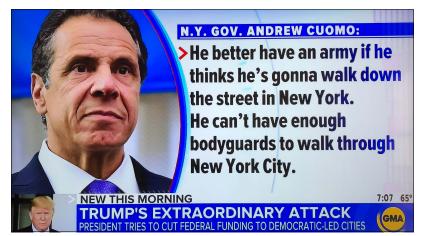
Yes. Noonie's demise is still an open wound. When, in the a.m., I dress for paradise, "dress" has both the obvious theatrical connotation and also that of "dressing a wound." Theater, wound both combine to make sense out of the pain, the passion of life, its mystery. Leading to catharsis, whose 1st meaning is *cleansing*. I am cleansing pain and infection by ideas from my nostalgic memories of Noonie - healing. So I can love again. Love. I asked Noonie once why he had such difficulty in describing emotional attachment in his experimental novels. He confessed: "It's like trying to describe



Trump encourages North Carolina voters to vote twice.



Republican rally at a speedway, no masks.



Trump threatens to cut of Federal funding to Democratic-Led cities.

walls, racist walls, surveillance walls, security walls. He concludes: "The Wall is the front line of what, long ago, was called the Class War."

The concept of the "wall" recalls the June heat wave I suffered here. Day upon day touched by the heat. A *wall of heat* you can't penetrate or climb over. One day scarcely different from the last. Oppressive heat. I have no air-conditioning. Only fans. There was no division between land and air, the heat placing me and my suffering dogs in a large sphere. In such heat, everything touches everything else and changes the surface of everything it touches. My car, Lexstacy — could've fried an egg on its hood — its driver's seat leather singed my thighs; my concrete driveway became a mirror for heat so intense I almost became a steak medium-rare while setting out the trash cans for the Friday collection. Climate-change temperature creep (see page 225). A tent of heat, but cooling fall (the election!), winter, and finally Spring with its annoying moth infestation (see pages 88-89).



Mashed broccoli cake for dogs.

But today temperatures are dropping. A high of 72 degrees, only. Blustering winds, rain and thunder rolling in at 10:30 a.m. September 1st, just 3 weeks until Fall. The dogs approve of the change. They are in good spirits. More affectionate than ever. Moreover, it is Snowy's 9th birthday! In 2 days it will be Duffy's, too. Snowy born in Missouri, Duffy in Scotland. Both dogs will get treats throughout the day and then dine on steak tonight with a mashed broccoli birthday cake covered with treats for dessert, while I sing "Happy Birthday" to them.

This is a yearly ritual that Noonie participated



Broccoli cake served up in dog bowls.

in with great fervor. I know the dogs will recall past birthdays and sense his absence from our celebration. I have kept some of Noonie's clothes in a plastic bag; every week I let the dogs sniff them as I play a video of him feeding and talking to them, so they will never forget him.

I realized I should have FaceTimed Mark. Let him in on

the dog birthday ritual; instead, I retreated into the past — again! — foregoing a chance to jump toward the future.

* *

My skin of the present is garbed in the garments of my past, but desiring a hug from the future. A hug which will press together present, past, future. I miss that hug. Even a Minimum-Body-Contact hug signaling an acknowledgment. But that Near-Maximum-Body-Contact hug with whispering fingertips? Wow! Noonie used to say that "It takes time to develop hug."

He always appeared in the kitchen in the a.m. with a laugh and a new (often bad) pun. Then we'd stand hugging for minutes — me still in my nightgown, he in his PJs — dogs bouncing and pawing at our feet, eager to be fed breakfast. He and I oblivious to their pleas, the dogs sensing our disconnection from their realm. We became temporally unknowable from their 3rd person canine perspective. Our touching bodies were processing *information*, articulating a history and the growth of our bodies together: a rooting, a branching, which led to the water and light in our eyes as we parted and looked at each other deeply.

Speaking of bad puns and multilanguage wordplay, the last Moleskine notebook entry I find in going through Noonie's notes and sketches is this brief exchange based on our vacation to Santa Fe several years ago and rooted in similarities of sound, e.g., *Jaume* is pronounced as "How may" *sombrero* can be heard as "some brero" and Rio Chama sounds like "real charmer":

> Scene: Hat shop near Santa Fe Plaza run by an old Mexican man. Owner: Jaume I help you? Young customer: Wow! Señor, that's really sombrero! Owner: Now aren't you a Rio Chama? (Continue this pattern for a whole scene.)

Yes, it's nutty material like this that often tested my patience, made me GROAN.

Writer Ottessa Moshfegh writing of love in the broadest sense: "Without it, life is just 'doing time'." That is certainly what I feel like, especially since the lockdown. My imprisonment is about doing *something*: photograph something and either put it in this text and/or add it to my Facebook postings. But my writing isn't *just something to do*. Making fine dinners, making a birthday cake for the dogs, working in my garden, decorating my house, that is something to do. My adventures into the scripto-visual, it's *serious shit*.

Writing is my response to my isolation, a snapshot of the bars that hold me, sure, but it is also about me giving voice to my concern about the dire direction of our country, about people suffering, about those in Sartrean *bad faith* who try to escape freedom through a gobsmacked adulation of snake-charming authoritarians, and about my ever-deepening relationship to Nature induced by the richness and diversity of the New Mexican landscape.

Nature feelings echoed in a book I just bought — One Blade of Grass, Finding the Old Road of the Heart: A Zen Memoir by Henry Shukman — wherein the author touches my heart: "I fell in love with hills around Santa Fe, hills of chunky red earth, fragrant with small pines and juniper. I fell in love with the town too, its ocher mud buildings sitting squat and hunched up under the sky... overseen by sunsets that were apocalyptic..." I wonder

if he's married? Teaches Zen. Knows there is a metaphysics to everything. That one must read a book with as much involvement as the writer did writing it. Wonder if he knows this quote, re: the artist, by Henry Miller: "You live tomorrow and yesterday. I live only today"?

Love is not something to do. As everyone knows, it needs to be experienced. That is hard to do with 2 people limited to facing forwards towards their respective laptop screens. A disappointing connection, like inmate and visiting spouse in a prison with glass between them, phone in hand. What does my FaceTime companion Mark see in my face? What I see? I see a face in a state of suspension between memory and expectation.



"Mr. Rainbow," profile photo.



This face, sent to me via OurTime.com, is one you'd expect to encounter in a face-to-face at the visitor's window in prison or on a passport from an alternative world. "Hi, I'm Mr. Rainbow and I like to discuss the writings of Anaïs Nin with radical women," he writes. "I never finish thinking because everything is *infinite*. Tail end of things and the beginning of other things *fascinate* me. Ever notice that these days the latest information too often accompanies ignorance?"

He admits that he *is* about to be released from an ABQ jail! But, he says, "It's on a minor drug charge. I'm a good guy, really. Bad cops. Trumped up charges. Stopped me and planted grass in my trunk because of my Antifa bumper sticker. Tased me. Knelt on my neck. Lucky to be alive. I named my 5-year old rottweiler 'Taser', but now I'm gonna change it to . . . Ah, got any ideas?"

Yep, he's shooting for the sympathy vote. The dog name thing, a clever lure. I admit, he looks like a younger Noonie on LSD. But I have my Mark. *Did I just write* my *Mark*? I have to call Mark. No more procrastination.

BECK ' N CALL:

Call: Pick — er — Beck. I was wondering when you'd call Call. [Laughs.]
Beck: Beck up the phone! I'm calling. [Playful tone.]
Call: You don't know how strange it is you've dubbed me "Call".
Beck: Yah?

Call: Beck, I was born *en caul*. You know, a birth when the baby comes out still inside the intact amniotic sac, the caul.

Beck: Yes. Makes the newborn look like it is completely gift-wrapped in a soft, Jello-like bubble. By the why, I own a Calder print. Just sayin'.

Call: An *en caul* birth is also called a "veiled birth". This weird thing of beauty happens in less than one in eighty thousand births.

Beck: Congrats! Did your mother freak?

Call: Yah, she called me her "bubble baby". My older sister got to calling me "The Bubbler".



Diego and I (1949) Frida Kahlo.

Beck: I like that.

Call: In my sophomore year in college I took a Chicano Studies one-oh-one course taught by guy whose tag was "Red Rudy". Great class. He was showing us art by the Mexican Muralists and Frida Kahlo.

Beck: I'm a Frida fan.

Call: One surreal painting of hers riveted my attention, *Diego and I.*

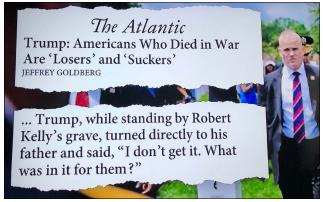
Beck: I know it. Noonie liked the idea of the self-portrait embedding her lover Diego on her forehead at the point of the "third eye". And the eye on his head. Said it was "indicating the coexistence of many worlds with different skies, one within another."

Call: That's the perfection of this painting, Diego's head with an eye at that chakra point as well.

Beck: Noonie told me the third eye refers to the gate that leads to the inner realms and spaces of higher consciousness. We

didn't get this stuff in my Freudian-oriented training. Noonie used to stroke my third eye. Said it'd get redder and warmer. I did feel an increasing pressure in my head between my eyebrows when he'd perform his gentle massage there.

Call: That's the feeling of the opening up of the third eye; in spirituality, it symbolizes a state of enlightenment or the evocation of mental images having deeply personal spiritual or psychological significance. Wow, Beck. That is wonderful! Sometime when the vaccine is distributed, I can do that for you, too. *[Voice softens.]*



Trump disrespects KIA soldiers as "losers."

Beck: [Blushes, but too subtly to be seen on-screen.] Shit, Call. The political situation. If Noonie'd lived he'd be waking up every morning playing Russian Roulette to see if chance favored him (the bullet firing) or not (an empty chamber). Shit.

Call: Hey. I understand. Me too. Crazy times. Such moral bank-ruptcy. Such hate. Such governmental corruption.

Beck: A total incapacity to empathize. A sociopath. Out only for himself.

Call: But Beck, you gotta know that history *is* nothing but the train of hope being sustained, kept on the rails, derailed, then put back on track — repeated *ad infinitum*. The Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet captured this in a poem full of hope I memorized long ago. It may soothe you:

The most beautiful sea hasn't been crossed yet. The most beautiful child hasn't grown up yet. And the most beautiful words I wanted to tell you I haven't said yet.

Beck: My gosh, Mark! I, I, I... That was wonderful, no *touching*. You really touched me despite the screen between us. [Blushing very deep, enough for it to register with Mark.]Call: In the film You Got Mail, Tom Hank typed: "Do you think we should meet?"Beck: Yes! Masked and distanced, of course.

* * *

21.0



Talking with Mark yesterday, he bought up the topic of Rhinoceroses. In relationship to my Trump tag of the Immanent Baboon. Reminded me that Eugène Ionesco had written a play *The Rhinoceros*. It was premiered in 1959. The protagonist, Berenger, watches everyone he knows, loves, and admires transform into loud and destructive rhinoceroses, which symbolize the dangers of conformity. "Since Trump is so obviously horny

Eugèene Ionesco.



Jean Ionesco's 1959 play The Rhinoceros.

— recall that video clip him bragging about his sexual aggressivity — that might be a more apropos term than your Baboon one, Beck. Writing in the early 1940s from Eastern Europe, as related in his probing book, *Present Past: A Personal Memoir* (1971), Ionesco describes fascism as 'Waves of pure madness' sweeping over the world. Wait, let me grab my copy. . . . Ah, found it, here he

figures a man transforming into a fascist ideologue: 'I spoke to him. Suddenly, beneath my very eyes, I saw his skin get hard and thicken in a terrifying way . . . a horn began to grow out of his forehead, he became ferocious, he attacked furiously. He was no longer intelligent, he could no longer talk. He had become a rhinoceros.'

"Ionesco, stuck in Romania, bemoans the brutal civil unrest stirred up by the fascists, The Iron Guard; he wishes that 'the thought that the mouths that speak, that hurl invective, that shriek insults will rot away, that the fists raised in anger will dry up, that all the sound and the fury will be replaced by silence, pure silence.' I wish that calm would come to our cities, too."

"But, Call, a calm not based on the suppression of points of view, an engagement in genuine human dialogue — Buber's I-Thou kind of stuff. We must strive to find an essential identity, the essential unity, that links us together. This is precisely what Trump wants to destroy. He gives his base an object to direct their hate. He thrives in utter chaos."

"Hitler took advantage of the violence unrest in Germany at the time. The clashes between Communists and Black Shirts was used to his advantage."

"Call, the Portland incident where an Antifa member killed a right-winger and then he was killed by police (to me, suspicious) was disturbing and is akin to . . ."

"Yes, Beck."

"I sometimes get insomnia. All this brutality and deception by the powers that be amps up my anxiety. In the dark, at night, things seems to fall apart. When it gets bad, I bring the dogs into bed with me. Helps."



After this chat, during which Call mentions people trying to sterilize library books in their microwaves with bad results due to the metal radio frequency chip in the spines, I went into the garage library shelves and retrieved Noonie's copy of Ionesco's book (placed back to front on my shelf). He'd inscribed "4-5-1974, hot day" (note the 5) inside, annotating the text so it was easy to find the

right section where he urges metaphysical concerns over our petty, divisive politics: "Nothing seems more lamentably stupid than to sell one's life to some common, ordinary political party *[he's speaking of both the Fascists and the Communists]*.... All systems are false." These parties are "full of the mud of propaganda" and encourage their followers to "think they have invented and thought what has been stuffed into their skulls." Noonie did a web-piece called *Roll-Overs* that is apropos here. On his website, 2 images were set-up so when you moused-over the 1st photo, the 2nd appeared (see above).



Trump's favoritism toward Russian raises an alarming possibility.

Keeping to his rhinoceros symbol, Ionesco in his memoir adds: ". . . rhinoceroses have deliiberately distorted, deliberately diverted the meaning of words ... which they have corrupted for propaganda purposes." Yes, such that, now, in our troubled times "democracy" is touted by the Immanent Baboon (i.e., The

Rhino) as sick "liberal socialism." The Devil calling Christian kindness, sick and weak. Liberals are slandered as responsible for everything from anarchism, racism, slavery, and the Ku Klux Klan; they supposedly admire Mussolini and Hitler; modern liberalism is little

different from fascism or, even worse, communism; mainstream media and academia cannot be trusted because of the pervasive, totalitarian nature of liberal culture, et cetera.

Trumpism systematically accuses the "Left" (which, these days, includes Moderates!) of the very programs they, in fact, promote. Conspiracy theories of the most astounding nonsense abound. During this time, it is a struggle not to be carried away by hatred at the way other people are carried away by hatred. It is difficult not to feel *anger*, yet I know that is precisely what the Baboon wants to stir up. My world, my past, no longer exists. I am living in a different world. Not one I like very much. Especially this past year.

Santa Feans are given a chance the 1st Friday in September to stuff a huge puppet,



The 2020 burning of the Santa Fe Zozobra on TV.



Noonie's Proofreader.

the Zozobra (Old Man Gloom), with tokens of things they wish gone from their lives. This year's theme was to burn His Evil Majesty COVID XIX: the 50-foot tall puppet's hair was made to look like a large coronavirus infestation — wish it'd been given The Baboon's awful hairdo. Interest in this event is going global due to the theme. Usually a raucous gathering in Marcy Park attended by 1000s, it is being safely televised on KOAT in an hour. I plan on making a big bowl of popcorn (sure to

evoke gluttonous sniffs by the mutts) washed down with a Dr. Pepper. Anyway, it'll be a cathartic experience.

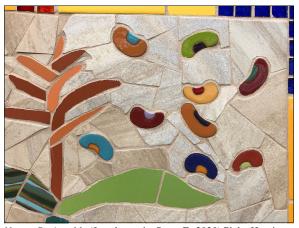
Mark and I FaceTime date to watch it "together," hoot 'n hollerin' the gloom of the past year into fiery oblivion. During our Zozo-Date, Call said Burning Man — a similar event started in 1986 in San Francisco — was inspired by our Zozobra (Spanish for distress) festival. I told Call about Noonie's filmmaker friend Virgil, who made a documentary of it when the event was moved to Nevada. And about Noonie's ex-student who became his proof-reader, a hippy-type with dreadlocks, who goes to celebrate that burning every year." Our casual fun exchange

- standing up and dancing with the characters in the Zozobra, our mouths full of popcorn

— relaxes us both. Much laughter. This was as close to a real "date" we've had. Signing off, kisses tossed with fingers, I feel a calm I haven't experienced in awhile. Yes. It seems Call and Beck are going to be mutually at their beck and call. And heed the "Stay home and read books" librarians' dictum.

* *

Pre-dawn. I awake too early. I awake to a grayness of questions: Will I see my grandkids again? Will their school be safe for them? Will my sons survive the pandemic? What is going to happen with the economy? Will I be safe — a woman was kidnaped not far from here and taken to her ATM to withdraw cash. Are we to live in an authoritarian state post election? Will climate change keep us in perpetual misery? (In 2019 *McSweeney's* devoted an entire issue to speculative fiction about such.) Will the California' Medio fire ever be put out (2 million acres burned to date)? Will I still be alive next year? I ask these questions with some distress. These are the subjective questions I ask within the objective conditions (the social organization of a particular time) under which I am writing this journal of the plague year. When I write "I" here, it is also a "we". The way I am, the way I think, is in large measure determined by objective lived-in conditions from both my past and my present. I am part of a social group, not an isolated Self.



Nature Revives Me (found mosaic, Santa Fe 2020) Picky Hunting.



"De Joke", who believes in Masaru Emoto's water crystal theory.

Yet there is also the personal and unique structure that I give to these anxieties, to my obsessions, desires. There is on the plus side the morning. I raise my curtains and the luminous sunrise over the Sangres gives Being to all things; it is as if this is the 1st time I am opening my eyes. Then the questions become: "Why this? Who am I? What am I doing here? Pure plenitude. I can hope for, throughout my day, everything being a series of epiphanies. "It should be enough to be surrounded by creation and dazzled by epiphanies," notes Ionesco. I hold that thought, and let out the dogs. They scramble madly to the coyote fence, barking loudly. The next door neighbors have just gotten a new puppy for their kids. A border war may be in the offing. Duffy riding fence, Snowy ready to raise a racket.

Speaking of raising a racket, news this a.m. is about tennis master

Novak Djokovic's angry ball-hitting tantrum (previous tantrums on record, plus irresponsible unmasked, undistanced parties during the lockdown) which injured a lineswoman. "Asshole! Take yer testosterone somewhere else," I yell at the TV. Hate these sports egos.

I go to his Facebook page and write: *De Joke (oh bitch!) you need anger management training, buddy. And a pin to deflate your inflated ego.* Now *that* made me feel good.

Noonie hated bad-tempered sports figures as much as I do. He used to say, when some sport-shit was bitching about some referee's call, "It is no longer men speaking but dogs barking." We'd both start barking at the TV, then the dogs would start barking and, wow, what a hoopla! Now, I suppose, Jokey's gobsmacked fans will put out a contract on me. Someone will BANG on my door — an unmasked figure with a tennis racket, wearing a Jade Fox T-shirt — and cough in my face, yelling: "Here's an approach shot, bitch!"

Speaking of rackets, again. Louis Dejoy reimbursing his former workers for donating to Trump's campaign; Steve Bannon's Build the Wall scam; Wayne LaPierre's NRA scandal; Jerry Falwell Jr.'s misuse of funds at Liberty University ("We're not a school; we're a real estate hedge fund," said a senior university official with inside knowledge of Liberty's finances); Trump's Wealth Institute scam, his Organization in general; the U.S. Justice Department defending the Immanent Baboon against rape charges, using taxpayer funds to do so. A seemingly endless list of corruption. A nothing is real, everything is narrative postmodern riff on postmodernism. No surprise, as many "legitimate" corporations (think Enron, Wells Fargo, et al.) began to routinely scam the public. That used to be the territory of "shady" organized crime operations. Not a surprise because capitalism is basically a global "scam" which is difficult to see because, as culture critic Mark Fisher put it, Capitalist Realism (neo-liberalism) "has colonized the dreaming life of the population." Since the collapse of most state socialisms, the regnant economic system has us believing we're living "The End of History."



Red Road (2007) dir. Andrea Arnold; dirty realism.

Part of our latest social racket, the "dreaming life" in post-industrial times, is the fascination with "the gritty," which attempts to evoke "the authentic," the "real," "the underside of society," a "dirty realism" at the behest of monetary gain. Distressed jeans, Marilyn Minter's photograph, *Wave* (2006), of a woman's perfectly pedicured foot in opentoed turquoise snakeskin high-heels stepping into dirty water that splashes up her thin legs,

dark urban scenes in films (*Batman* films), graffitied walls (*Red Road*); images which look like they were shot with a Polaroid, re-photographed with an iPhone, and put through the VSCO photo-editing app, giving grit and grain, light leaks to the final image. But gritty realism has been outdone by His Majesty COVID XIX. Danger is *really* here! A mutilated world of dirty surfaces, unmasked zombies madly partying, plague victims, and death doesn't have to be manufactured. Those who can — like me — retreat into cloistered coziness, connecting via Instagram, Zoom, and FaceTime.

* :



Surprise September snow storm: "Snow covers the slopes covers the slopes" (Robert Grenier, *Sentences*). When might this sentence (repeated 4 times) be taken as racist?





San Francisco at 12:30 p.m. Smoke from fires.

A monstrous cold front hits us. Chama hit with snow so heavy it has brought tree limbs down onto VRs in a campground; Taos smothered, car choking; an inch here. It will melt fast, but temperatures drop 50 degrees. Doesn't bother His Evil Majesty COVID XIX, cases continue upward.

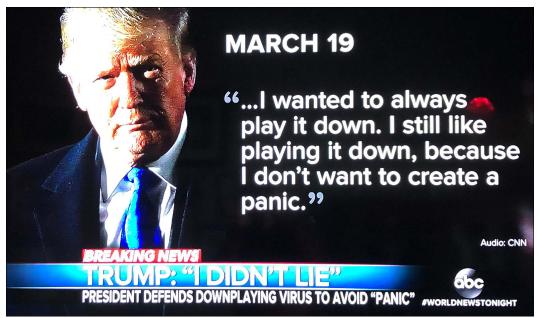
Bob Woodward's tapes reveal the Immanent Baboon's meager coronavirus response. BTW, ironically, a grouping of baboons is termed a "congress of baboons". An heroic whistle-blower details The Baboon's attempt to divert interest from Russian meddling toward China and Iran.

A bus-load of enthusiastic female Baboon supporters is headed Santa Fe way. That group must be eager beaver to have that primate grope them.

Unprecedented forest fires in California and Oregon leave the sky in San Francisco dense with thick red smoke, nearly unbreathable. What horrors will happen during the rainy season without ground cover in those areas! Mudslides, whole communities attacked by nature, again.



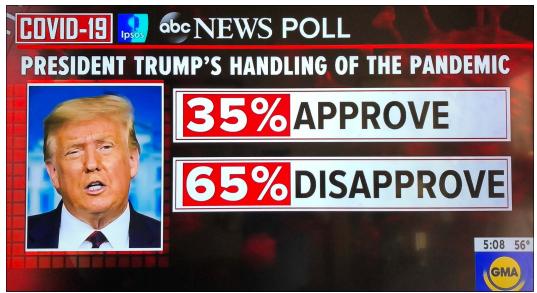
Largely unmasked women for Trump come to ABQ. "Faith, Family, Freedom" their rallying cry — all of which are being corrupted by The Immanent Baboon Groper — ideology's blinders at work.



We thought China's economy turning to capitalism would make them "more like us," instead we are more like them.

[Trump] could suggest that there was world of pure white Americanism, of good industrial jobs, of proper authority, that used to exist but has been stolen by the forces of change that put a Black president in power. Trumpism is a Ghost Dance for white, male America, an act of faith that the invaders can be banished and the old order restored. The mines and steel mills no more returned to the Midwest than the buffalo did to the Great Plains. . .

- Fintan O'Toole, "Night and Day," New York Review of Books (9/24/20)



Autocratics pose as populist champions of a mystical People. Trump removes the idea of a public servant who may have a conflict of interest by making everything in his interest.



My encouraging message written on my steamed up bathroom mirror.

Despite this litany of misery set within the horror of an economic system where other people are just props for the fantasies of men who get wealthier by the second, I must maintain hope. I finger-scrawl that word on my bathroom mirror. If I adjust my position just right — like viewing a daguerreotype — I can see my face inscribed within the clear areas of the letters, text and image formed into a single virtual entity: HOPEANDME. Something externalized in

text, but which I want to encourage within myself.

I mention this to Mark during our FaceTime date. He says our iPads are mirrors, too. We both bemoan the scourge of robocalls we suffer as well as the crappy healthcare here in Santa Fe. At a certain point, he says he has a sign taped above his bed: YOU SHOULD BE WORKING. I ask him to prove it — I want an excuse to see his bed — so he carries his laptop into an average-sized room, minimally decorated, some potted plants. Once in the room, he calls out "Alexa, I want to hear Nat King Cole's 'Quizas, Quizas, Quizas' *[Perhaps]* from the soundtrack to Wong Kar-wai's film *In the Mood for Love*," and in seconds we're listening to Cole singing in Spanish. A *very* romantic language. Mark's laptop cam slowly pans to his bed. I spy a copy of Wendell Barry's *The Gift of Good Land* on his night table. His camera lovingly pans his bed top to bottom, seeming to caress *the bed itself*, before tipping up to show the guilt-inducing sign on the ceiling. "Perhaps, you'll take that sign down if I come over . . . ?" The camera nods a silent YES.



Mark's succulent named "Franklin Pierce".

"You said you're a great gardener, but forget to water indoor plants. I want to introduce you to my green babies." He moves about his apartment showcasing his house plants. "Here's 'Muppet Baby'." It's a succulent, wide leaves, the color of fresh grass. "And here's 'Franklin Pierce', my bathroom succulent which looks a bit like a cactus, but a soft one. He raises his green and white arms in praise of the New Day and Hope. My favorite. I see him every a.m. 'n p.m. 'cause he sits on my bathroom sink." I mention how much I adore the pot. "Thanks. Now this jade plant I call 'Potus'; next is 'Big Boy' here; he's my largest plant. Leaves like a tree." I see it's a Great Burdock. "Here, in my kitchen, are three hanging plants, Trailing Succulents, I've dubbed The Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future." I ask him why succulents, other than you don't have to water them often. "If LIFE is a major suckfest these days, how to acknowledge that and yet celebrate LIFE nonetheless? Well my plants are doing just

that. Get it, Beck?" I do. A cleverly planted Noonie-ish plant pun to catch my attention.

Now I know what types of plants he likes and why. His need for a kind of utopian serenity that cannot be wholly satisfied within the suffocating and non-stop emotions of our current divisive society. We each do our gardening in our own way for emotional support.

Further into our live chat, I ask him what type of woman he hates (all men hate *some* kind of woman). "For sure, Beck, Texas blondes," he replies, adding that "They just gotta



Mark's choice for "Women I would never be attracted too." What Noonie dubbed "Pringles".

be pro-Trump! That cold stare, white face of neo-liberalism (what Brit blogger Mark Fisher called "Capitalist Realism") staring at you. You see these Nordic types on Fox News. They are the preferred Republican spokes-woman-type, like that White House 'Mac Ninny'. Wait, got a jpeg to shoot to you." (He e-mails it to me.) "Here's what I mean; snapped this off the boob tube last week. Don't they give *you* the creeps, too? Some years ago these angels would be

found in cigarette ads. Referring to back then, Annie Leclerc notes, 'the cigarette is the prayer of our time.' Little wonder that the Tea Party was really into smokers' rights in its formative days. Now the right to NOT wear a mask has taken the cig's place."

"Call, they still look like they could be holding a cig, at their sides." I notice these gals are the type that show up chatting with TV celeb Andy Cohen on "Watch What Happens Live." I tell Mark that "Noonie called these often breast-enhanced females 'Pringles': the very sound of that word passing one's lips, and the fact that that food product is overly-manufactured into perfectly *stacked* chips, makes that tag fit the referent perfectly. Noonie could see big stories hidden away in small ones."

"And small stories about boobs hidden away in BIG ones." Mark laughs until tears come down his face. *Is he trying to 'Noonie-ize' himself for my benefit?* Since he's laughing I want to keep the comic mood rolling. "Hey, do you want me to read you 2 men's dating ads I've come across lately?" He does. "Here are 2 *[profile pics added to this text]*":





Curly-Haired, Late 60s NeverTrumper Male Widower writer seeks attractive intellectual for Covid-safe gourmet dinner, too-long runs; I am vigorous, with eclectic tastes, romantic; my dream lady must *not* have finished David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest*. Post-COVID, let's be snuggies.

Pansexual Anarchist Asian Male multilingual, suffering quarantine malaise (the constraining power of circumstances), and the fact that Robert E. Lee is yet not a dead god, seeks partner in crime. Have you had the experience of a train conductor who at one time punches your ticket, then next trip, keeps it? Me, too! No EverTrumpers or stamp-collectors or bridge enthusiasts need apply.



"Whoa, Beck! Amazing. Like that snuggies cartoon, don't you?. That should be *the* International poster for honoring post-COVID dating couples."

At this point, I have an idea. Valentina sent me a link to an online site where you choose your favorite colors — "Picky, like choose what colors are dominant in your wardrobe" — and it gives you a personality readout. She

suggested I try it, doing Mark's profile as well. She knows my flair for fashion, my interior decorator eye for color combinations. Excellent idea. So I suggest to Mark we try it. I ask him to choose the colors he thinks he looks good in based on his wardrobe and will do the same. "In an hour we will each e-mail the other our color test results, yes?" He agrees. "It's a great idea! Picky, pick your colors!" Here are the computer results:

Picky: TOO CARING. (green, blue, red, orange)

Picky is soulful and passionate and sees the world differently from most. The version of her that you see depends entirely on how you treat her, her friends and family — kindness will be met with kindness, and compassion. But if you betray her trust, she will not hesitate to take you down. She is one of a kind, because she knows exactly who she is, and she is not ashamed of it. She knows that her weaknesses and strengths alike make her the amazing inspiring person she is today.

Mark: OUTSPOKEN. (silver gray, grayish blue, black, plum)

Mark has a heart that shines like a supernova. He is a star, talented and handsome, beautiful inside and out. People look for his advice and guidance. He has been through a lot in his life, and even though he hides his hurt and pain, his experiences are also the things that give him the strength to be the amazing person he is today. He has no time for fakes and liars, because he prefers to spend time with the people who are real and down to earth. He isn't angry very often, but when he is, you should seek shelter!

Mark and I are soon on FaceTime excitedly discussing how astounded we are about how accurate the readings of our personalities are based on our color preferences.

"I like what I read, Mark."

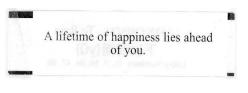
"I like what I read, too, Picky."

We are silent, staring into each other's faces screen-a-screen. I feel a closeness, a connection, and trust I haven't felt for awhile for a man.

"Mark, Call, I have a dental appointment so must sign off, sorry."

"Keep those chompers perfect, Picky."

Later that day, after my take-out Lu Lu Chinese supper, I open my fortune cookie and read.



*

Vitalina and I are FaceTiming. Re: Mark, I ask her, "Is it an emotion in excess of the facts?" She shrugs. Tells me about a project by book artist, Lou Cabeen (Noonie once met her), about an inspiring work titled *Words Every Child Has a Right to Know vol. 1* (c. 2016). "These are boxed sets of 40 flash cards, hand set in Century Schoolbook type and letterpress printed on heavy card stock in an edition of 20. Here, I'll send you a jpeg of one set. . . . The issue here is words eliminated from the 21st-century editions of the *Oxford Junior Dictionary* for children aged 7-11: the replacement of 'natural' words with 21st-century substitutes, the dropping of definitions of words like 'acorn' and 'buttercup' in favor of 'broadband' and 'cut and paste.' 'A' should be for acorn, 'B' for buttercup and 'C' for conker, not attachment, blog and chatroom, according to a group of incensed authors that included Margaret Atwood and Andrew Motion, who were 'profoundly alarmed' about the loss of a slew of words associated with the natural world from that dictionary and their replacement with words 'associated with the increasingly interior, solitary childhoods of today.' Interesting, isn't it. I hadn't *imagined* this was going on, were you Picky?"

I told her I wasn't. I was shocked.

"Hey, what do you expect? Academic 'relevance' meets neo-liberal 'globalism.'

"This only exacerbates the distancing of the natural world experienced by kids, particularly those stuck in urban environments, in our digital age. I think of Romantic poet William Wordsworth's dictum: 'Love of Nature Leading to Love of Humankind.' He touted ecology in his 1810 book on the British Lake District, *A Guide to the Lakes*. Nearest thing then to an environmentalist manifesto. Took a seminar on ecocriticism once."



Words Every Child Has a Right to Know vol. 1 (boxed set, c. 2016) Lou Cabeen.

"Picky, I've read that there is a shocking, proven connection between the decline in natural play and the decline in children's well-being; research found that a generation ago, 40% of children regularly played in natural areas, compared to 10% today, with a further 40% never playing outdoors. 'Obesity, anti-social behavior, friendlessness and fear are the known consequences,' they say. A campaign has been pulled together by Laurence Rose, who works for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and who provided a list of more words taken out, including hamster, heron, herring, kingfisher, lark, leopard, lobster, magpie, minnow, mussel, newt, otter, ox, oyster and panther. You can see why I found Cabeen's artwork so illuminating."



Aldean Sunset (9/12/20) Picky Hunting.

"Holy shit! The reverse for me here. I am constantly learning the types birds and other wildlife I never encountered in Chicago, not to mention an increasing appreciation of Native American reverence for Nature."

"I know. This incredible land, the history of the diverse people on it, the wideranging wildlife . . . well . . . I love it here."

"Ditto, Vita. Last night in Aldea our sunset, well, the sky looked the most luminous I've seen here yet: swirls of cirrus, cumulus, and altostratus clouds appeared to have been set afire in a range from light blue to red carmine. Put the pink and yellow flowers in the foreground and you have sublimity. Nothing I ever saw in Illinois. I couldn't have made a better decision than to move here."

"Well, I certainly enjoy our exchanges. You prove it's possible to be a radical and still like flowers. You ordered that book *One Blade of Grass* by that Zen teacher, right?"

"Not arrived yet, slow mail. What is the sound of one package missing?"

"Ha! Let me leave you with a Quantum koan: Picture a massless particle. Get it?"

"Bohr-ing!" We sign-off. Last time we FaceTimed, Vita asked me to meditate on Barbara Chase-Riboud's title for her book of poetry *Every Time A Knot Is Undone, A God Is Released*: "Pick, Chase-Riboud, not Romeare Bearden, was the first black artist to appear on the cover of *Ebony Magazine*."

I replied, "Shit, now, every time a knot is undone, the Immanent Baboon adds two half-hitches, a figure-eight, and a clove hitch.

"Put him in a noose — fake noose!"

* * *

22.0



The World is End, Madrid, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.

"The World Is End" states graffiti on a wall in Madrid, New Mexico. It sure seems so. The fires in California and Oregon and Washington; the multiple hurricanes blasting and flooding the Gulf Coast; the rising COVID cases; the confusing disinformation about the virus circulated by Trump Administration; politico Caputo's outrageous statements (see image in the frontispiece).

Easy there, Hoss! I know, calm down Picky. But this shit is so disconcerting. Okay, I'm going to try calming down by doing a 20 minute bout of *zazen*, sitting meditation (yes, that book *One Blade of Grass* by Zen master Henry Shukman arrived, touting meditation's benefits).

I place myself in a chair, my *zabuton*, my *zafu* a folded blanket — no more quarter lotus positions for this old body with its shrieking knees and sacroiliac aches — facing a diamond-finish wall in my hallway. I focus a small desk lamp to create an aura of light on its smooth surface, something for my eyes to rest on. My gaze fixes on that rich, tan surface,

glowing in the light of my lamp, the light's range of brightness obeying the inverse square law. In minutes, I start to relax. Initially it is difficult to clear my mind of hateful thoughts about the Baboon, Michael Caputo's seditious gun 'n ammo provocations, the undermining of CDC's science, EverTrumper stupidity, the distracting fantasies of Mark and me, seeing my dear Noonie falling to his demise, the dear dogs chasing blueberries I toss to them, the fire-orange syrupy air suffered by Portlandians, the chefly stress of trying to bake cakes and

pies at high altitude, the daily questions: What I am to have for dinner tonight? and When will that new Johnny Was blouse I ordered become an Is Here? — on and on my mind races recklessly, undisciplined.



Eventually, Zen positioning, my riveted gaze on the milky coffee-colored wall,^{*} and the counted breaths in sets of 10 (Noonie's 5 + 5), begin to suppress errant thoughts until I am not quite doing something, yet am quite *not* not doing something either. Soon I *am* the wall, smiling back at Picky. My mind empties further. I start to see *through* the wall's surface, into its molecules, then into its atomics, particles — *Picture a massless particle*.

A great ball of energy seems to spin before my eyes. I feel a shudder like a blast of high desert wind going through aspen trees. Then a warmth so comforting in my chest. Something as ordinary as a wall becomes a universe in itself. An "awakening experience" called *kensho* (the "gateless gate") in Rinzai Zen practice. A kind of phenomenology: *You and your experience are one*, mixed with French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's therapy concept of "the short session," what Zen calls "sudden teaching."

After awhile, an intense love for that diamond-polish wall wells up, something akin to falling love with it, and it with me. A Martin Buber I-Thou moment produced by "cooking" inside my meditation bubble for the recommended time, emerging "done," i.e., feeling connected, no longer lonely and afraid — part of *all* existence. But why if the sadness returns? Shukman's book has the answer: "Trust the sadness. It knows how to unwrap you." Valentina told me something like that during my last hair-cutting with her.

Getting up, putting the chair back in place, I stretch my elder spine and look out my living room window. I notice my magnificent garden. I recall me whispering to each plant as I planted it to start my new garden: "I am your angel bending over you to say, 'Grow, grow'." I also see stands of dark green junipers and piñon eking out their brave lives in the red-baked earth in Aldea's common area, the purple Sangres walking across in the distance as an ancient backdrop. I think of the waving branches as cheering me on: "Picky, you too can stand firm in the dry soil of today's challenging *Umwelt*." I think of D. H. Lawrence also looking through his bedroom window and seeing "the trunk of the great pine tree, like a person on guard," and then recall his confession that New Mexico "changed him from the outside."

I've now started my *inside* working in conjunction with that *outside* — to heal my fears, my loneliness. I need to do this daily before breakfast, before retiring for the night. From my clinical practice, I know how overwhelming thoughts can get for my patients. Now

^{*} Henry Shukman's *One Blade of Grass* discusses Bodhidharma, one of the grandfathers of Zen, as meditating for hours by staring at a cave wall over a period of 9 years; hence, the Zen tradition of facing a wall during meditation at *sesshin* retreats. Supposedly, he cut off his eyelids so he couldn't sleep; tossed on the ground, they took root, resulting in tea bushes.

it's *physician heal thy self* time. When you can recognize that thoughts are just that *thoughts*, their pernicious hold over you wanes. For me, no need for Zenly zoris, robes, shaved skulls, chopsticks (albeit, Noonie and I loved to use them), or group meditation retreats where complex power dynamics intrude.

Nope. I can do this at home, the dogs my meditation partners. I can do this outside, hiking through small side canyons with chamisa bushes and cacti, with boulders over-shadowed by sun- and wind-tortured junipers, the gritty red granite under heel.

Today I stand before my bathroom mirror. I greet myself upon arriving in my own



White Glove (2020) Picky Hunting.

mirror. Each of us smiles at the other's welcome. I again love that stranger who is my own self. My reflection asks: "Are you getting what you want from life?" I reply, "I am. I am beloved of and on the earth."

I go to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for us three life-adventurers. What I see suddenly before me is surely something sheer surrealist,"as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table" (Comte de Lautréamont): my white rubber glove (why only 1?) hung to dry last night, my black Navajo-design coffee mug, my Keurig coffee-maker, Keurig K-cups, my wooden westie dog breakfast tray, my wooden cabinet. *Be still and give in.* I take a photograph.



Poli-Diptych (2020) Picky Hunting.

While sipping coffee before the TV, listening to yet another Trumpian outrage, the large screen image freezes into a bizarre diptych pairing a well-known news commentator and a Democratic politico in another surreal arrangement — *Be still and give in* — I take a photograph.

Something very Zen, for me, about these radical shifts in sight — 1 real, 1

virtual — 2 visual koans. Koans. Dark to the mind, radiant to the heart. A mode of direct prompting to get the Zen student to challenge his or her world view without verbal arguments or dogma offered. An "Aha" phenomenon. Noonie, a "KoanHead", took inspiration

from Zen koans — as did fine art photographer and theorist Minor White (d. 1976) whose *nom de plume* was "Sam Tung Wu" — Noonie saw these short narratives as inducing "strobe flashes of insight." Being a skilled archer in his late teens, he'd read *Zen in the Art of Archery*; as a teacher, he'd assign his class to read *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. He loved the fact that Zen thrived in paradoxes. He was excited that Zen was compatible with cutting-edge physics and cosmology. Being an inadvertent punster, and believing puns to be akin to koans, he'd riff on a famous Zen koan, substituting the word *cow* for *dog* and *moo* for *mu* in the original:

A monk asked Zen master Joshu in all earnestness, "Does a cow have Buddha-nature?" Joshu answered, "Moo."

Yuk, yuk! But I upped this Wisconsin-born professor — he exclaimed "Touché! — after I offered my riposte:

A Wisconsin diary farmer invited a visiting Tibetan monk to his farm. Looking at the herd, the monk, dressed in his robe and wearing zoris, listened to the herd moo. He then turned to the farmer and said, "Be sure to care well for your cows, they have the Buddha-nature."

I rush to get ready to see my doctor. My 1st visit since the lockdown. His specialty is pulmonary disease, so I imagine he's been overwhelmed. I expect to see a very stressed out man. I get what I expect. Both of us masked, we look like highway robbers planned a heist. He sits with his little dictaphone reciting in a monotone my medical history and tests (imagine a coroner dictating his notes during an autopsy in a crime drama). That microphone becomes a wall separating us: passive female patient vs. active male professional. I don't like it. None of my previous physicians used that device *during* our consultation.

Then he's up from his chair, standing before me, in my face barking: "Your aches and pains won't kill you *this* will!" rattling on about cholesterol levels, Afib, getting enough sleep, blah, blah, blah. The usual suspects of old age. "Maybe you should try Mysore style power yoga, huh? They teach it here in Santa Fe, you know." He hates alternative medicine.

He discounts the discomfort I suffer from my trick hip and knee as beyond his attention. He's only concerned about what shows up in numerical form as test data. He exudes no sense of rapport with me. I could've done this interview via FaceTime or Zoom given his unwillingness to create a productive doctor - patient relationship. When it comes to setting a time for later tests and another office visit, he pushes me off until March 2021: "I will contact you then. My appointment schedule only shows dates three months in advance." I feel I've been blown off, as the saying goes. Crap medical care.

* *



That joust with my doctor has drained me. I go to bed early. A dreamless sleep. I am dead to myself.

I awake to watching on GMA a boyband singing, all dolled up, trying to dazzle the audience with song some digitally enhanced, it sounds like a computer is singing. What a futile thing,

to be bouncing about in a spectacle meant to gobsmack the young to distract viewers from the actual pain of life today. Then on comes the gut-wrenching news: RUTH BADER GINSBURG DIED ON THE EVE OF ROSH HASHANAH.

No I said no, it can't be, no . . . with the Republicans still in power! No! I am standing up, almost spilling my coffee.

All the calm I'd achieved yesterday is dashed in a sec. I try to muster my Zen composure: *Walk. Know your way. See the here. Recall that place. Turn the corner.* But the place has changed to the Supreme Court and it is about to turn a corner, a firm turn to the Right if the Immanent Baboon and its minions have their way, spitting on the liberal justice's grave, so to speak. Are we ladies to be given a zipless fuck by the 7 male members of the Court? Pre-Ginsburg, a girl in our society was viewed as a 1/2-formed thing; are we to return to *that*? I go back to my wall and chair to meditate.



Shanah Tovah greeting from my cousin Mary.

It's Rosh Hashanah. I always made hash 'n eggs for punful Noonie for breakfast on the Jewish New Year. I make them for me and the dogs today. I try to do my Zen thing: *Just cook, Picky!* Meaning fully attending to my hash with eggs-over-easy— *be the eggs*— so as to go *beyond* my grief over our untimely loss of RBG. Little success. I wipe more than 1 tear off my cheeks. I start to feel isolated, violated, unloved.

On my iPad several Facebook postings about RBG's passing. My cousin, Mary, posts a *Shanah tovah u'metukah* wishing me a Happy New Year and mentioning the significance of RBG dying on the eve of the Jewish New Year: "A 'person of great righteousness': the Jewish community notes the significance of Justice Ginsburg's death on the eve of Rosh Hashanah." I know I am not alone in my sadness about how dire the timing of her death is politically. A shared grief becomes less a negative thing and more a positive calling for unity of purpose. Mark posts a wonderful tribute to Ruth — "Her nonbeing will be blissful" — ending with a koan that hints he's written it with a wink, knowing it will elicit a groan:

What is today's ruling from our now deceased Justice? Is it that the not-knowing enlightens?

* *



Meanwhile, bad news abounds. The Immanent Baboon wades into the American classroom with a speech in Mosinee, Wisconsin (near where Noonie's ancestors lived) declaring American students need to be taught what he calls "patriotic education," accusing his liberal opponents of trying to brainwash children about racism, a direct attack on so called "political correctness" and "identity politics":



The Immanent Baboon: We must clear away the twisted web of lies in our schools and classrooms and teach our children the magnificent truth about our country. We want our sons and daughters to know that they are the citizens of the most exceptional nation in the history of the world.

The Baboon's fascist claws extend even longer. I desperately need an escape from this nightmare. Valentina's touted the Danish TV series "Borgen" (2010 - 13) as perfect escapism: "It's streaming, subtitled, on Netflix, Picky; got sex, romance, a female Prime Minister, ideological conflict. Ho! One character, Kaspar Juul, a troubled spin doctor, gets 'barbercided' by his toddler son, has to shave his head clean."



"Borgen" (Season 3, episode 9) Danish TV streaming on Netflix. TV1 News Director in marital trouble.



I watch the 1st episode. I'm hooked! It's got terrific acting, well-cast, literate. You believe in the characters. I begin to binge-watch. Danes are more in touch with their emotions, more honest about them, if one can believe the narrative. Moreover, I love the setting, Copenhagen, as Noonie and I had a romantic time there, eating at Noma restaurant, even standing in some of the same places I'm now seeing on my large screen. Brings memories. Listening to the mellifluous Danish language has a calming effect on

"Kaspar Juul" in "Borgen", before his son gouge-cut his hair.







me. The subtitles are welcome also because my hearing is not so good. The newly elected Prime Minister, Brigitte, is my kind of woman. She deals with things as they are, the good and the bad, accepting their perpetual, mutual existence. She is pragmatic. But she does what she can to make things better, negotiating her way into power enough to nudge forward and realize some of her ideals.

The show covers similar political tensions to our present situation in the USA. The antiimmigrant Right for instance. The series expresses *hope through struggle* — good medicine for me right now as the Baboon sets forth his possible right-wing choices to replace Ginsburg. The thought that women's abortions rights are in danger horrifies me.

Add to this impending political disaster, the Baboon's persistent denial that His Majesty COVID XIX isn't interested in summoning into his presence anyone under age 18. Statements that

can only led to further deaths. And behind the Baboon people (probably a paid crowd)



cheers him on. Arizona and Florida, where the virus runs rampant, still support Trump, polling suggesting the Baboon's economics and his deportation machine tossing out some 584,000 people remain popular. At the melancholy calculation of human calamities, my mind starts to go into overload. Guilt, shame, and horror. My 2nd dirty martini. Odd thoughts fill my head, weird ideas, a

train of thought filled with my baggage and society's, which I can't get rid of — a train consisting of nothing but cabooses, cabooses, cabooses, cabooses, cabooses:

Float, drift, attack, strike, laze 'n ease. I have grown fondu and fondu* of my stove.... I can't play tennis without a partner or with tendonitis.... My garden flowers grow in great profusion as if rebelling against the coming of Fall tomorrow.... I should check on my red roses at night with a flashlight to see if they remain red at night.... No meaning, no meaning. ... Let100 tennis balls — 50% red, 50% blue — spill over Rome's famous Spanish steps, filmed in slow-motion from above. How many red to blue balls fall right, left, and center? ... Thinking about lashing myself to my aspen tree during the day before and the day after the November election (like J.M.W. Turner did to a ship's mast during a storm). . . . Cars with dark tint windows going down the hill in front of my house look like nobody is driving.... How wonderful Mark would look if garbed like Lawrence of Arabia.... Does the morning's frisky breeze here have something to tell me?.... Noonie, with his craze for names, loved this art historical factoid: Pintoricchio (or Pinturicchio), birth name Bernardino di Betto (also known as Benetto di Biagio or Sordicchio), was a poly-named Italian Renaissance painter. . . . Is there significance to the fact that I found a truck-flattened AA-size battery by the side of the road while walking the dogs yesterday? Why did that flattened battery feel so nice to my hand? Because it proved the earth could be flat? Does my bathroom mirror exist (along with me) when I am no longer looking at it? To assure that it does, I am going to sign my mirror-image with my lipstick . . . My 1960s visit to the Parthenon touched a chord; this morning on my classic music station a chord of music from Brahms' Four Serious Songs touched my soul.... A

^{*} Fondu is a ballet term describing the lowering of the body by bending the knee of the supporting leg, a movement Picky no longer can perform. There is a pun here among the words: "fondu," "fonder," and "fondue."

diet specifically designed for poets and writers: "Withering Bites." . . . *Rauschenberg comes to my home and erases all my aches and pains....* I am re-membering things from things I don't know I knew, making new connections.... I am not thinking about this as I type it.... Do racists look at images of the The Last Supper and realize that everyone in the frame is Jewish? . . . No more inconsequential perplexities. . . . All are consequential.... But hope resides in the Plaza Café's carne asada Frito Pie washed down with Prickly Pear Lemonade. . . . Tacocat spelled backwards is tacocat.... Is a sunset seen through Lexstacy's front window while returning home from the De Vargas mall more real than seen in my rear view mirror when going to the De Vargas mall?... Jean Baudrillard would say no....* "Last evening's sunset had a certain stillness about it, as if Piero della Francesca had done the color" (David Markson is correct).... I like Bingo, I love Branzino, I adore Bronzino.... Paintings with small transmitter "bugs" fixed to the back, skull-sculptures made of centavos.... Sunnyside up eggs wavohing at me from my show-pan.... 8-11-1956 on J. Pollock's grave stone. Noonie was 9 then. ... Hector's little boy's name was Astyanax; sounds like the name of a new drug touted on TV that has side effects that can kill you.... Write a children's book featuring 2 illegal LatinX kids nicknamed "Bolt" and "Scatter".... Noonie would often underline in library books he took out that had nothing to do with the courses he was taking at the time, believing that he often found therein things connected to other things that he never expected, even to things relevant to the courses he was taking.... Shit, it's Larkin's birthday today and I have yet to post on her Facebook page.... People more readily swallow lies than truth, more homey to taste lies. . . . I am thinking this (and writing it) all in 1 fell swoop, my jazzed molecules dancing and riffing.... The lockdown has made me a good interior Da-Sein-er.... I can ignore the rain here, because it hardly rains here. It's what floods through my media connections that erodes me, drowns me.... But Zen teaches: setting up what I like against what I don't like leads to a diseased mind. Okay. So now I've only got 2 choices: madness or innocence?.... Will I worry my hair is too thin to hold a hairpin? My father's advice, uttered in a voice with so much gravel in it you could walk on it, would be "Get on with it, somehow!"

^{*} In French theorist Jean Baudrillard's concept of "hyperreality," driving, looking out the windshield, yields a simulation of reality, a projection on a screen.

Autumn equinox eve 2020. Before watching "Borgen", I do something stupid. Because I've imbibed too many dirty martinis, I foolishly decide to use my outside kiva fireplace to burn old checks from old banks accounts, to destroy stacks of financial data, records on my former patients, material I don't want to put into the trash for fear of someone stealing information. I stuff them in. One big crunch of paper. I don't cut them up into small pieces for easier burning as Noonie would've insisted had he been here. In the 8th grade Noonie won a Junior Fire Marshall badge for his poster promoting Fire Prevention in the Home. I go to bed with my documents still smouldering. I assume they'll be consumed soon.

I reap the results: I hear in my left ear a voice saying: DIE! DIE! I awake startled and smelling smoke. It's 3 a.m. and the fire is still burning, smoke blowing into my house as the wind is now coming toward me, not out over the large common area as when I lit the fire. I can't breathe — a vaporous cop on my neck. I haul myself out of bed, wrap a bathrobe about me, and toss a glass of water on the smouldering papers. More water. More water. I think it's out.



Officially, the Fall Equinox. I awake and announce it to the dogs who tilt their heads and probably think I am announcing some new kind of treat for their breakfast. I then rush out to see the result of my very early morning fire suppression efforts. Oy vey! The pile of partially burned papers is only 90% contained. It is still smouldering, the iron grate is warm. I flood the fireplace with my garden hose. Success. But what a wet mess. The wind is blowing with even more intensity than last night. A fall wind that blows into my mind Chinese Tang era poet Li Po's line about "wind tens of thousands of miles long."

GMA's news today: Fall-

ing in the polls, our Immanent Baboon plays Mr. Tough Guy by hinting at contesting November election results and overruling FDA vaccine guidelines. Every day a new outrage befalls us. Those optimists who thought Trump would eventually turn over a new leaf and become "presidential" are as wrong as those who think winter isn't coming.

My iPhone rings. It's a call from Call "beckoning my Beck" to a "COVID-safe date at El Nido's patio dining." When I hesitate, he adds: "Beck, they offer spit roasted chicken, smokey grilled vegetables, and mac 'n cheese with chorizo, amazing cocktails, too."

"Oh!" He's calling me into the food trap! "Well, yah, there *is* a lull in new infections and restaurants are doing well in maintaining hygienic conditions."

"Friends I know are meeting non-family members for outside dining, no prob."

"Where is it?"

"El Nido (The Nest) is a top restaurant. Farm to table stuff. Great service. Yelp reviews consistently high. Located up on Bishops Lodge Road very near The Tesuque Market. Snug patio. They've installed big tables so we would be distanced when seated across from each other. Beck, we'll both wear *double* masks, okay? I just had a COVID test that was negative."



"Call, let's call it an equinoctial date, then." *Mac, cheese and chorizo? Jeeze.* "I need a respite from all the bad news these days."

"Ditto to that. Tomorrow night, okay?"

"See you there — 5:30 sharp?"

"Beck, call it a date, then. Let's dress up a bit in Western theme, huh?"

"Boots and hat. Just bought a large Zia necklace. You got it, dude." *I've really agreed to this? Sure have!*

I Google the restaurant, check its menu over. Wow. Wow. Wow. They serve Noonie's fav — *cacio e pepe* — a dish that he could eat during radiation therapy without his damaged taste buds revolting. If Mark orders that dish it means . . . does it mean what I think it means?

After drooling through El Nido's menu selections, I check my e-mail, to find I've received another OurTime.com request. This time from a "Captain Swing" who is looking for a very very specific pen pal (and more):



Me in my virus mask.

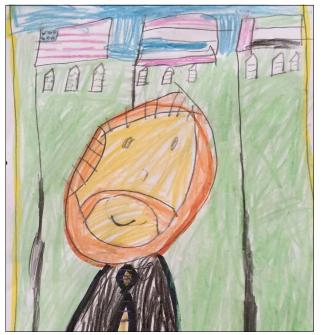
Captain Swing, late-60s mixed race male stuck at home. You too? Do you like to write? Looking to connect with a kindred spirit? If yes, I am looking for a female pen pal willing to have her grammar checked (I'm picky, too). I mean *real* writing and envelopes! Like in Wendell Berry's dictum about "Why I Am Not Going To Buy A Computer." I would prefer someone with a graduate school background, open-minded, reasonable looks, good sense of humor, respectful and courteous, with a diverse interest in the arts, well-read, and follows the news and politics quite closely (no matter how depressing it is these days). I am a relatively happy and well-balanced person, and YES I am attached, but there is a *void*... Let's see where it goes. Tesuque location, but willing to travel within 60 mile radius when our ink pens need refilling.

Next e-mail in line links me to a Facebook posting by an old buddy of Noonie's, Jack Fulton, an artist/educator who lives in the San Francisco Bay area. Back in the heyday of Conceptual Art, Fulton and Bruce Nauman (whom Noonie studied with at UCLA and was influenced by) collaborated on several artworks, including the famous series "Eleven Color Photographs" (1966 - 67). Just the kind of poetic positive posting I need to boost my immune system to toxic politicians. What a delightful man! *Too bad he's not single*. Jack's posting is worthy of Li Po:



Jack Fulton: This morning, the 1st day of Autumn 2020, rising @ 6:15 the morning papers were picked up, recycling deposited in proper bins, and my camera grabbed. Off then to the edge of the San Pablo Bay hoping the sun's rising would be red and quite large. In my truck listening to the period of psychedelia in Beatles music, I watched two sets of 17 pelicans float and fly by, then a set of eight. Listening to "Mother Nature's Son" a coyote walked past, toward the Target store, hesitated, turned, and came back. He was thin, wiry, and small. Then the sun did come out from behind fog, not smoke from the near fires that've destroyed tens of thousands of acres. No color as it was white-hot and not big. I started the truck, drove home to coffee, wondering all the while why everything felt supernatural.

I still keep in touch with Noonie's friends. People he told me who were so instrumental in teaching him, inspiring him — he deeply loved them. Another reason to discount suicide in his case. Someone hated him enough to bump him off and has gotten away with it.



Ode to Diplomacy (2020) Jerome.

Next e-mail in line. My red-haired son in Washington, D.C., who has just retired from government service, sent a fabulous portrait of himself as drawn by his 10 year old son. Both of my grandkids are natural artists. He's glad to flee the political chaos, grow a beard, and play with his son. Mazel tov to him!

I look at my watch. Just enough time to wash Lexstacy's dirty windshield and get to the only CVS Pharmacy that has the high dose flu vaccine and the only store here that carries my favorite canned water, La Croix Peach-Pear.

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23.0

"Dogma lives loudly within you."

 Senator Dianne Feinstein during Judge Amy Coney Barrett's Court of Appeals confirmation hearing in 2017.

"My dogs live loudly within me."

 Picky Hunting to an attending vet at Gruda Veterinary Hospital.



Snowy and Duffy are 9 years old. Both dogs are on Budesonide and Ursodiol medications for their gut and liver, so I make regular trips down the Hwy 599 to the topnotch vet clinic in the area.

Today is such a trip. I wait in my car until called to come into the large, luxurious waiting room. Nicer than most human doctors' waiting rooms. The large overhead TV silently provides the latest fallout over revelations about the Immanent Baboon's tax returns. Shocking. What a scam artist!

It is obvious he must remain in the White House to dodge serious prosecution and serious debts. Does not bode well for a peaceful transition of power. Add the religious nut nominee to the Supreme Court into the mix . . . Oy vey! My friends are freaking out.

Noonie's old friend, Barry Singer and his wife Gigi

who live near Napa are again suffocating from smoke thanks to the awful "Glass" fire which so far has killed 3 people. To make things worse, a package delivery truck parked uphill

from his home, the driver forgetting to put on the parking brake and it rolled down hill, up the curb, through their front shrubs, and smack into the side of their house. Took hours of hassle to tow it off his property. "What's next, frogs?" he writes.

I wish he and his wife would pull up stakes and move here. Barry, a dealer in vintage photographs, on the side a superb vintner, markets his award-winning wine under the label Singer Cellars. His "Best of Class 2013 Gold Medal Napa Bordeaux" blend is named ARIA (70% Petit Verdot, 12% Cabernet Franc, 8% Merlot). Noonie and I ordered a case. My hubby's 1st taste of this gift of fruit from Napa Valley got this written response (culled from a Moleskin notebook): "Dense, rich aromatics of brambly wild blackberry mingled with traces of forest floor and black currant; dark cherry bathed my mouth while layers of subtle cedar, black and red currants, and blue- and blackberries join in; a lovely cocoa essence with traces of blueberry appeared mid-palate to complement the juicy yet dry flavors as they lingered on; the structure remained in the background with just enough presence and finesse as to not be forgotten." *Remained in the background with just enough presence and finesse as to not be forgotten* — oy vey! — the perfect description of my late father.



Just as the the dogs and I are called into Dr. X's examination room, longtime scammer Peter Popoff's ad for Miracle Spring Water comes on. I've Googled this jerk, finding a malevolent history of prosecutions for fraud; amazed he's allowed to place ads for this pisswater on television. Another Trump-like character.

Long-time scammer Peter Popoff's TV ad for Miracle Spring Water.

The vet's exam

room is sheer Danish *hygge*: painted in tasteful, relaxing light browns and off-whites, softly carpeted, functional but comfy chairs, all designed to simulate a living room environment in an effort to put dog patients at ease. I've never seen anything like it before in a vet's office. The doc sits on the floor and plays with the dogs for awhile to relax them. Snowy, who always gets overexcited, pees and whines, is totally at ease. Duffy who usually dashes under a chair in fright, cuddles up to the vet.

I tell the doc I want these perfect pets of mine to live another 5 years (at least), that I care for them as I do myself. *Really, better than myself*. They are on a more stringent diet than I. In Oak Park, I had a superb vet, born in Israel. But so good, she was overwhelmed with doggie patients. Wait times were long, she was rushed. Not here. A doggie Ritz. I know

my precious pups will be given the best care. I leave with refilled prescriptions and handed a toy and treat for each dog. A real classy act.

On my way back home on the 599 North, a black 4 x4 Dodge truck with red flames blazing on its hood, full of 4 asses, rushes up Lexstacy's ass. As it passes, the driver sasses me through his open window, a beefy guy sporting a MAGA hat. As he overtakes me all 4 goons flip me off. Snowy barks. Duffy growls. On the truck's bumper, a Cowboys For Trump sticker. Posted speed is 55, I'm doing 60, he is doing at least 80. If I had a dollar for each time this happens to me here, I could buy a full chef's tasting at restaurant Sazón.



Rippled clouds as seen from Picky's veranda.

By the time I arrive home, the predicted cold front has settled in, rippling clouds making a startling ceiling over head. A 20 degree temperature drop today.

I make a sliced chicken with buffalo-wing sauce sandwich and settle down to the noon news with its sense of the world as an incomprehensible tragedy, a black comedy for stoics, a nightmare for cynics.

Besides the usual coverage of Trump-dee-Rump-dee-Bump-Bump, I find that Armenia and Azerbaijan are at it again. At the heart of the conflict is a dispute over control of the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh, recognized as part of Azerbaijan, it has been controlled by ethnic Armenians since a war ended there in 1994. A war during which 10s of 1000s of people died and a 1,000,000 others were forced to leave their homes. Concern that the latest fighting could spill out of the region and draw in neighboring powers, including Turkey, Russia, and Iran since major gas and oil pipelines run through the region. *Oh, great, just what we need, another oil crisis*. I like the fact that New Mexico is big on solar and wind power. Each day on KOAT news they give how much alternative power has contributed to the energy used that day.

As the Immanent Baboon blathers away from a podium. I recall that Austrian writer Karl Krauss, never at a loss for biting words, when asked about Hitler, quipped: "I don't know what to say about Hitler." I get like that at times, too. No words left to describe the horror of having Trump and his crew in office during the Reign of COVID XIX and the floods and fires following upon climate change, the science of which the Baboon denies.

I sure miss Noonie at my side to share discussion over our world in crisis. When he was alive — as we both rushed forward in time, my face was always turned toward the future, his turned toward the past, seeing the chain of events leading up to the events unfolding in our present — our different perspectives made our discussions POP. I dearly hope that Mark and I develop such a relationship. I am both excited and dreading our dinner date — *both/and* romantic logic. Maybe St. John of the Cross has an answer, a strategy to overcome my divided feelings: "If a man woman wishes to be sure of the road he she treads on, he she must close his her eyes and walk in the dark."

Snowy goes into a barking frenzy at the Baboon on TV. I can still hear Noonie telling me, reminding me, that the unbridgeable gap between the ideological Right and the moderate Left (like ours now) wrecked Austrian democracy. "History does repeat itself, Picky, often as farce." *Seems like I think of my late husband more often now than I did when he was alive! Still feel his presence.*

My iPad dings. My index fingers dance over the glass surface of the Pad. A message from Noonie's friend, Lew. Driving around Wisconsin, a Red State, he's come across Pro-Trump scenarios that are beyond the pale (no Rainbow Coalition here, only Rambo):



Trump Campaign Ad, Wisconsin (2020) Lewis Koch. A machine-gun phallus. "Democracy cannot exist when men prefer ideas and opinions that are fabricated for them" (Thomas Merton).



Trump Campaign Billboard, Wisconsin (2020) Lewis Koch.



* *

The long-awaited debate between animal and human beings. Another kind of "Hot in Cleveland" episode — not a Sitcom, but Shitcom.



CHAOS IN CLEVELAND TRUMP & BIDEN CLASH IN INSULT-FILLED FREE-FOR-ALL



TRUMP'S "STAND BY" STUNNER PRESIDENT REFUSES TO CONDEMN WHITE SUPREMACISTS Noonie's friends are e-mailing with yells of outrage.



Trump's calculated pose: riser shoes to increase his height and a lean-in stance to hide obesity.

STAGE DIRECTIONS: Biden crosses himself, and the Baboon boxes his ear.

Women's rights, racism, health-care, pandemic. Within minutes Snowy and Duffy are barking wildly. My stomach is turning flip-flops. The Baboon is howling; the trainer/moderator tries to calm the beast. Three people nearly screaming at once. The human is trying to reason with the Baboon. Call the cops! The Baboon needs to be tasered, tackled, knee put to neck.

> I can't breathe! Good. Now we can.

MY DREAM: Allowed out of his steel military cage for exercise, Trump dons his MAGA hat and swings a broom handle as if it were a baseball bat. Who does he think is pitching to him? Take a guess, fill-in the blank: ______.

INSIGHT: Theodor Herzl: "If you will it, it is no dream."

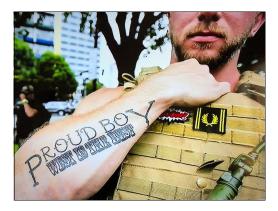
FLASH BACK: Philosopher Martin Heidegger, 1933: "The Führer, and he alone, is the reality and law, today and in the future."

FLASH BACK: Sir Jeffrey Amherst, during the French and Indian War, wrote a letter regarding the use of smallpox blankets as a weapon against Native Americans. His staff implemented the order.

MOMENT OF ZEN CALM: Werner Heisenberg: "Space is blue and birds fly through it."

FLASH BACK: Donald Trump: "I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it, you can do anything ... grab them by the pussy."

OPINION: No one's ever painted a woman's back side better than Boucher and Renoir.







Picky Hunting's new COVID mask, a gift from her son.

FLASH FORWARD: NPR reports that the White Nationalist group "Proud Boys" is having patches with Trump's words, "Stand back and stand by" immediately made up for distribution.

FLASH FORWARD: One of Paradise's delights (promised by St. Augustine) is peeping at the damned (i.e., Trump) suffering their just deserts.

LUDIC FLASH BACK: Benito Mussolini: "To a restore Italia's great classical pasta, we need to a risotto extreme measures and honor the angel hair of our donne Italiane, and feed strozzapreti ['strangled priest' pasta] to Comunista priests."

THE AFTERMATH: Absolute reason expired at 10 p.m.

Some commentators say the Baboon has gone beyond the pall. Others claim His Pants pulled down Biden's before millions of viewers. The election is still a crap shoot. A roll of the cosmic dice. Noonie believed in chance — you can't live in Los Angeles and Chicago all your life and *not* believe in it if he was still alive, he'd be prepared for any eventuality. Probably be out now buying a .44 Magnum, ready to join the post-election Troubles with Trumpites, ready to yell at the forces of reaction that famous Clint Eastwood quip: "You've got to ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky? ' Well, do ya, punk?"

The amount of toxic waste eman-

ating from the Baboon's mouth forces me to don my new gift, a custom-made COVID mask featuring me and my 2 dogs. *Thanks, son.*

I take my inner-doctor's advice: 2 Ambien for sleep. The dogs on the bed.

* *

Next day. I immediately group e-mail what I've written above in my "journal of the plague year" to friends. Responses come in fast 'n furious. Some picky: "Baboons don't deserve to be associated with the likes of Donald Trump." Some catching bad typos (sorry, I wrote

in haste). This response from an old college friend who is the CEO of an insurance company is like a Zen koan: "Picky, an aspect of probability is that many improbable things will happen." The most typical e-mail hails from a PI Noonie and I met on a Scandinavian cruise and who became a good friend:

Subject: Spot on Picky, re: that Presidential shit show...

Are we doomed? This is the State of our Democracy?! Everyday I am fighting the urge to go out and buy a handgun. I spent my entire Social Work/Probation-Parole Agent/PI career without a gun and now, in my old age I fear more than ever for my family and friends. It's hard to remain positive. Let's hope for this Country to gain some common sense.

Take gentle care,

Dallas (a.k.a. Houston, as in "Houston, we have a problem.")



Corona virus statistics, 9/30/2020.

The morning news: racial terrorism in Michigan, fears of election chaos promoted by the Right, rising cases of infection in New Mexico. Hope Hicks has COVID (counselor to President Trump). Noonie's birth-state, Wisconsin, has so many new cases that Green Bay's hospitals are near capacity. Baboon supporters refuse to wear

masks, preferring to enroll in his Death-of-the-Month Club. Conservative Catholic Justice in the Supreme Court — sooner than later? Speculation over what she'll do: help Trump steal the election, help repeal Roe versus Wade, suborn the subordination of women, destroy separation of Church and State, issuing in Margaret Atwood's dystopia, Gilead.



Warren, MI 24-year old "Racial Terror" suspect in custody.

FLASH BACK: In 1817, Papal censors refused to allow the heroine of Rossini's opera Cinderella to show her bare foot. The Libretto was rewritten to exclude the glass slippers.

FLASH BACK: In 1073, Pope Gregory VII ordered Sappho's poems be burned.

FLASH BACK: "Very great is the number of the stupid," said Galileo.

Steven Mnuchin, Secretary of the Treasury, is on screen. I toss a banana peel at

him. Snowy, who suffers from IBS (sensitive stomach), throws up on the kitchen floor. Coincidence?

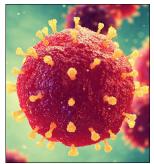
* *

Keep apart, keep apart and preserve one's soul alive that is the teaching for the day. — George Gissing



Trump and his minions do not keep apart or wear masks — mock those who do — and now their debt to the 1000s who've died of the virus through their neglect has come due.

BREAKING NEWS



His Evil Majesty COVID XIX.

The Immanent Baboon and his wife have become hosts to COVID XIX who is paying an official visit to the White House. A much hoped for event brought to fruition by the efforts of Hope Hicks.

My BFF, Melanie, texts me: "Ironic — what the hicks have hoped for has been fortuitously reversed through the auspices of Hope Hicks."

"Gives us hope," I re-text.

In some election years there is the "October Surprise" as suffered by 1 of the candidates. In the 2000 presidential

election, Fox News Channel broke the biggest scandal of Bush's campaign: 24 years earlier, he'd been arrested for drunk-driving in Maine. A few days ago Mark and I were speculating what this election's "October Surprise" was going to be:

"I'll bet my money on the revelation he's been shagging Hope Hicks," he said, using a tone of voice that made me tingle.

"Nah, that'd only boost him in the poles with his misogynist 'base'. No. My vote is for someone to get a copy of that rumored "Pee-pee Tape" * that Putin holds over the Baboon's head to assure American non-interference in Russian aggression."

"Oh, yes, yes. Please let it be that, Picky."

My iPad dings. It's Mark messaging me — all in caps: "POETIC JUSTICE, BECK. THE WORLD HAS GONE FROM BAD TO WORSE, BUT MAYBE WE ARE IN FOR A REAL SEA CHANGE NOW. MAY THE DOMINOES FALL."



Abe / Flo play tourists in their own town.



Trump supporter wears mask improperly.

Abe and Flo e-mail me about holding a Zoom champagne Happy Hour at 6 p.m. tonight with Aldean friends. I decline. Need a haircut badly.

Vita texts: "Worried. Hope it's not a hoax, hoping His Pants isn't trying to dodge forthcoming debates, gain the sympathy vote."

Val messages me: "\$70,000 on hair-cuts during 'The Apprentice'! WTF?" She's always a bit behind on the latest news.

Mary from "Soo-Saint-Mah-Ree" e-mails: "An abuser gets his comeuppance. Remember those poor kids separated from their parents, the pussies he's grabbed, the deaths he's responsible for."

Matt is zooming up and down Avenida Frijoles in his Tesla, honking his horn.

Moss, across the street, is lowering his American flag to half-mast, pipe in mouth.

My neighbor's kids are yelling and playing with Day of the Dead figurines on their back patio.

On TV a Trump supporter says: "He's strong. He'll recover and this won't affect the campaign."

A Sliding Scale of Outcomes Between Trump Campaign ------ Abe and Flo of Champagne

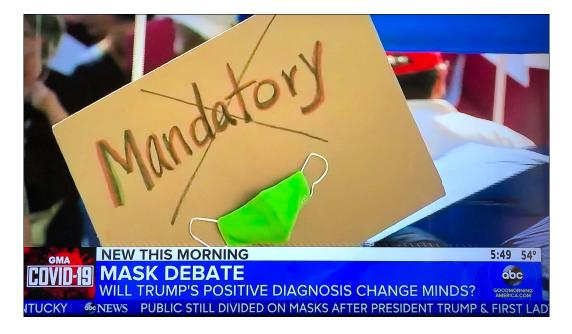
Dominoes. The Republican unmasked are falling in sequence:

^{*} The video in question reportedly shows Trump in the presidential suite at Moscow's posh Ritz-Carlton Hotel, watching two prostitutes pee on a bed the Obamas supposedly slept in. The incident allegedly took place in 2013, when Trump was visiting Moscow to attend the Miss Universe pageant.



The Great Unmasked: all now testing positive for the coronavirus.

Yet the stupidity lingers. "We have to believe in free will. We've got no choice."



Cheerfully gruesome voiced pronouncements from the White House defined: Seminonfictional semifiction.*

*Noonie said one should always read with a [red] pen in hand as recommended by Delacroix in his *Journals*. Ergo, I've underlined the above term, a description applying to his own creative writing, as a tribute to my late hubby.



COVID stats for the USA ($\overline{10/4/20}$).

That Frenchy Flaubert claimed you have to read 1500 books in order to write 1 novel. Noonie read 4000 before he wrote his 1st book.

Could take 20 years for people to catch on to wearing COVID masks, if you believe Surrealist poet Louis Aragon: "The nature of genius is to provide idiots with ideas twenty

years later." Meanwhile, Green Bay, Wisconsin has become the new epicenter for infections.

John Stuart Mill: "The remedies of all our diseases will be discovered after we are dead."



Pence and his wife.

Picky Hunting: "I imagine that Vice President Pence demands his wife (whom he calls 'Mother') spread Oral B toothpaste on his brush each morning."

Misattributed to Mike Pence: "We should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature."

"Now, ears open, you fuckin' fag. Stop callin' this Proud Boy a crypto-Nazi or I'll bash ya in yer goddamn face."

Adlai Stevenson: "If the Republicans would stop telling lies about the Democrats, we would stop telling the truth about them."

Picky Hunting, in response: "No, we wouldn't, surely."

David Markson: "There is no word for war in Yiddish."

Picky Hunting, fact checking: "Word for 'war' in Yiddish: *mlkhmh* — or so Mr. Google says."



A disaster scenario — final scene in *Hamlet*: The sound of marching echoes through the hall, and a shot rings out nearby. Fortinbras marches into the room accompanied by the English ambassadors, who announce that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Horatio says that he will tell everyone assembled the story that led to the gruesome scene now on display. Fortinbras orders for Hamlet to be carried away.

* * *

24.0



New Mexico gets good marks (like I have my good Mark) for COVID testing. Our governor is *on it*. If NM had been a Red state, I would've never moved here. I feel safe. But I want to be safe with a companion — like Abe and Flo together. My steady in-the-flesh companions, the dogs, my steady pulpy companions, my books. I

love books. Aldous Huxley noted that "the proper study of mankind is books." Schopenhauer, "the artist's philosopher," called reading "Thinking with someone else's brain." Michel Houellebecq has written an ode of him: *In the Presence of Schopenhauer*. Noonie, who could be as pessimistic as that Kraut and who'd have ordered Houellebecq's book had he lived, told me that, that bit about someone else's brain. But Noonie had his own turn of phrase for reading's pleasure: "Drinking with/in new and old friends." He certainly groped his books: broken spines blood-red markings. BTW Schopenhauer named his cat "Atma" Attaboy!





Morning news today overflowing with the Baboon's antics while a patient. I think of Hitler's radio speech after the ill-fated attempt on his life in July 1944, telling his supporters the allpowerful Führer he still lives. As I watch the drive-by of His Pants, waving: Good morning, and in case I don't see ya, good afternoon, good evening, and good night! His image behind thick glass looking like a TV screen. The backlash: "political theater." The dodgy reporting on his condition by syncophant medical staff. Confusion.

The key term here is *theater*. Staged. Not improvised, not spontaneous. All under con-

trol. All enactments; re-enactments. His Pants the Star, his adoring audience feeling empowered, too, because they can be seen on TV. In His presence. Watched and re-watched. Since 2016, the world has been watching a Reality TV series "The White White House" — think of the 1998 Hollywood film, *The Truman Show*. Substitute Trump for Truman Burbank (Jim Carey). But Snowy, Duffy, and I are not amused.



The Baboon is now bragging that since he's met His Majesty COVID XIX in person and bested him, he's better qualified than Biden to lead the battle against the bloody pandemic. I'm not amused. But Noonie was amusing and liked to be amused. So is/does Mark. I know Noonie either died by accident or by someone's evil hand. Why? Noonie's vision of the perfect death was to collapse during an hysterical fit of laughter, as had the

Athenian comic playwright Philemon. If he had been contemplating suicide he'd have been binge-drinking Turkish coffee while binge-watching comedies like *Napoleon Dynamite*.

BTW. I amuse myself this morning. With myself. And lead the dogs on a wild goose chase. I desperately search for a new pair of blue jeans I'd recently ordered online. I know it arrived. As previously mentioned, I have an "inventory problem" when it comes to clothes. Too many, way too many. Some even overflow onto my large movable metal coat hangers when I am sorting them. So it takes me a frustrating hour of poking my nose (followed by Snowy and Duffy's noses) into 4 large closets before I realize I am *wearing* those damn jeans. Feel a bit meringue-brained today. *Go with the flow*. Think I will bake a lemon meringue pie tonight. "Risky at these high altitudes," warned Flo, "baking."

"Check out the Santa Fe Bulletin Board today, Picky," says Flo over the phone. Stern warning about tracks of, and a sighting of, a cougar. I think it is very near where, and when, you walk your dogs. AVOID SUNRISE AND SUNSET STROLLS IN THE AREA OF CALLE LA MIRADA AND THE ARROYO — reads the posted warning.

"I will henceforth leave off leaving at those times, with the mutts," I tell Flo.

"I leave before being left. I decide," Brigette Bardot said, says Flo, continuing, "I leafed out since I decided to vote Left."

"Right on," I reply.

"My parents were Rush Limbaugh fans, into the flow of right-wing sewage."

"Fools rush in . . . I could never could stomach that jerk."

"Hell, Limp Paw can't even *lung* himself out of bed anymore." *

The Baboon is leaving the veterinary veterans' hospital at 6:30 p.m.

*

* Rush Limbaugh is slowly dying of stage IV lung cancer as this is being written.



"Don't be afraid of COVID. Don't let the virus dominate you." Virus = right-wing political code for: people of color, LGBLT, and liberals.

Big news. The Baboon unmasks on the White House balcony, putting on his demogogue's mask for national televison coverage. The moment is used in a Trump campaign ad. Walks into the White House without his mask on. This, as 18 of his staff, etc. test positive for the coronavirus.

"Flu season is coming up!" the Baboon wrote earlier. "Are we going to close down our Country? No, we have learned to live with it, just like we are learning to live with COVID."

Biden: "Anybody who contracts the virus by essentially saying masks don't matter, social distancing doesn't matter, I think is

responsible for what happens to them."

Picky Hunting: "And to others, I add, thinking *a species of genocide aimed at the poor*. "May the devil bung a cesspool with his skull." I write on my Facebook page.

Good advice, well said, Picky!

I imagine Mark calling me after seeing my post to add that in New Orleans minorities make up 77% of the coronavirus deaths. "Add that Beck." Then. Beckoning me closer to his heart. Visions of "Beck & Call." Carved into a virtual tree.

How many days until the election? Google says 28. *London Daily Mirror* headline after the re-election of George W. Bush in 2004: *How can 59,054,087 People Be So Dumb?* In the 2016 election 62,984,828 people voted for Trump — dumb and dumber.



"Dummerd Tramp," is how my youngest grandchild pronounces Trump's name pointing at the television when the Baboon appears. Smart kid.

Trump yelled at Biden in the debate: "Don't ever use the word 'smart' with me!" Hey, buddy, no problem. Hadn't crossed my mind. I swear.

Some unknown source whispered to my son (when in government service): "The Russians' code name for Donald Trump is *P. P. Dodovic.*"

Mark asks me what I will do if The Immanent Baboon wins (by whatever devious means). I said — alluding to, and riffing on, a key scene in film *The Shining* — I would sit and type my mantra until Noonie appeared, like in the film *Ghost*, and told me to stop:

ALL WORRY	AND	NO	PLAY	MAKES	PI CKY	А	DULL GIRL.
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ALL WORRY	AND	NO	PLAY	MAKES	PI CKY	А	DULL GIRL.
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ALL WORRY	AND	NO	PLAY	MAKES	PI CKY	А	DULL GIRL.
ALL WORRY AND NO PLAY MAKES PICKY A DULL GIRL.							

ALL WORRY AND NO PLAY MAKES PICKY A DULL GIRL. ALL WORRY AND NO PLAY MAKES PICKY A DULL GIRL. ALL WORRY AND NO PLAY MAKES PICKY A DULL GIRL. . . .

He didn't want to worry me. My son. Getting his degree in Oriental languages he set out to perfect his Mandarin in China. Hiking, he fell off a cliff; grabbed a bush, which didn't hold, then grabbed at a tuft of grass, didn't hold, finally doing a "Hail Mary" reach for a large root — it did, hold. He lost a shoe. He was saved. Luck. He didn't confess to this to me until years later.

Diogenes, supposedly: "I'd rather have a drop of luck than a barrel of brains."

Another journey. Over the Chinese border into India. During a monsoon. Hitchhiking. Roads flooded. Hungry. Low on funds. With a girl friend in tow. Somehow he MacGyvered it. Made it across.

On a train through China, listening to Commie propaganda on a loudspeaker for hours, he could take no more; got up and ripped the damn speaker off the carriage wall, daring the authorities to arrest him. They thought he was crazy and left him alone.

He beat cancer.

Survived a tough break-up. Et cetera.

So.

When he calls me today to sadly tell me he's been laid-off his IT job at a bank along with a slew of others, I assure him his past survival skills will get him through it. He's encouraged.

He has courage. He is witty. He knows his way around craft beers. He is unique. He is my son. "Why don't you host a *ylog* from som

"Why don't you host a *vlog* from some cool bar?" I advise. *I imagine his antics* going viral, a global audience unmasking to enjoy his wit, knowledge of libations, and good comfort food. 'A foamingly good glass-demic,' critics will write.

His Zenly advice for me — drawn from his Asian experiences — "Sit in thy cell and thy cell shall teach all things."

He knowing "my cell" is my TV garden equipped with large-screen TV, iPad, and iPhone plugged into the world of media. Me a TV Buddha. Into the global groove.

Dead sons. The Gold Star Mothers. Exposed to the Immanent Baboon. Hugging him. Just before the slew of sick with the coronavirus. Did the Baboon know he tested positive when he met these people? Thirty-four people infected as of today. And tomorrow?



The infected.

Mitch McConnell hasn't been to the White House since August 6th. And won't go. Because of the laxness of virus protection measures.



More military officials are infected. Threatens national security. Putin smiling (*putain* = French for whore). Fears Putin will soon make his opening chess move. Attack westward. Maybe during a Trump-induced election chaos. Which might become violent.

Right-wing militias. Lone nut-jobs. Abortionists, gays, lesbians, transgender all potential targets, too. They *were* blamed for 9/11 (Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson). Now liberals, people of color, elected liberal officials — potential targets.



This Tweet violated the Twitter Rules about spreading misleading and potentially harmful information related to COVID-19. However, Twitter has determined that it may be in the public's interest for the Tweet to remain accessible. Learn more

Flu season is coming up! Many people every year, sometimes over 100,000, and despite the Vaccine, die from the Flu. Are we going to close down our Country? No, we have learned to live with it, just like we are learning to live with Covid, in most populations far less lethal!!!







Trumpf triumphant. Yelling about his "total cure," mute about when he last tested negative. Then downplaying the risk. No mention of the chronically ill, those so-called "long haulers" who suffer complications for months after contracting the virus.

A fly lands on Pence's head for 2 minutes. No reaction. A virtual presence, he is. Was that a sign from On High? Had it landed on Kamala Harris' head, some Fundamentalibecile surely would have seen it as the Sign of the Devil.

Odd. Given the name. *Fun*damentalists (think Pence) don't seem to have much fun. Exception: Pat Robertson, Jr.

BREAKING NEWS

Kidnap plot against Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Bad luck number 13 for the 13 arrested. No surprise, given the boost to their cause by the Baboon. Michigan Militia Corps. Suspect more rightist violence to come as the heated election approaches.

> Proud Boys. Three Percenters. Patriot Prayer. Boogaloo.

A fly lands on Pence's head for 2 minutes. A fly lands on Pence's head for 2 minutes. A fly lands on Pence's head for 2 minutes. A fly lands on Pence's head for 2 minutes. A fly lands on Pence's head for 2 minutes. A fly lands on Pence's head for 2 minutes. A fly lands on Pence's head for 2 minutes. A fly lands on Pence's head for 2 minutes. What's *your* reaction?

The Baboon's "Praetorian Guard" ready to take advantage of either right- or leftwing violence in the streets after the election through the Protecting American Communities Task Force (PACT). Bolstered by William Barr, leading proponent of the cryptomonarchist "unitary executive" theory of presidential power touted by Trump. The Baboon calling the FBI that arrested the Michigan militia members as part of "*my* Justice Department." Such injustice.



Bill & Mitch, Caught Trying to Gnaw on Democracy, Get Theirs (2020) Vitalina.

Vita FaceTimes me. She's all color and glow, tells me about a new video performance she's working on. "Probably use David Bowie's song 'Look Back in Anger' on the soundtrack." Then she sends me a startling jpeg. "Caught a pair of pesky mice, Picky. Peanut butter lured 'em. Hope you like. See. A double-header, even! Might use it as a projected backdrop for that video" [laughing, sucking on a lollipop].

Yikes! Had Noonie seen this photograph, he for sure would lapse into French theorist

Roland Barthes' — with his interest in image - text interactions — jargon about properties of photographs: *studium* and *punctum*. The former, the photo's *studium*, is always coded, culturally obvious, such as the near decapitation in the symbol of 2 foul fascists who are corrupting democracy; the latter, the photo's *punctum*, is what picks at me as an after-thought, as do those voracious tiny ants swarming about.

When I tell this to Vita, it sidetracks our discussion of The Baboon onto another set of rails — relationships:

"Study him, then punch him — my dating advice [laughs]. See how he reacts.

"Yes, we had our tense disagreements. Noonie and I."

"Natch."

"In the end, I think I was a mystery to him. He to me."

"But you can't stop talking about him, telling me about him in detail, Picky."

"We are, all of us, such secrets from each other, Vita. There was a kind of 'metalanguage' hovering over Noonie's everyday discourse that I had trouble accessing. There was a river running deep under mine that he couldn't step into. Vast spaces between us. Despite his homiletical leger-demain. Actually, maybe *because* of it, now that I think."

"Arguments? Misunderstandings?"

"Yep. Like we were each talking to someone else, at times. Worst was once. I make this excellent dinner, see. Salad, salmon, sweet potato. The three S's. Before I sit down he's sampling the salad. I embarrass him, punitive scorn at his scathingly bad manners: 'Sacredness is realized in the act of attention to dining,' I say, picking at him. He sits sulking for a second or six. Then dishes his salad plate onto his main plate, mashing up salmon and sweet potato with it. 'A Slammin' Salmon Pie' he dubs it. An act barbed with meanness. I freak. I felt choked by two invisible hands. A refined form of cruelty. We don't speak for a week. Eat separate meals. Stares about what cannot be said. Okay."



Chekoff: brilliant auteur of modest means, a Jewish immigrant from Kiev whose speaks French; passionate about ancient Greece and Rome; pasta and sushi; seeks kinetic woman who loves Russian novels, makes great borscht. I am a 60 year old pipe smoker (but discrete about it). Better than an 80 year old non-smoker. I photograph current Resistance Movements like ANTIFA.

"Normal, shit, Pic. Don't sweat it. Each of us is a little civilization built on the ruins of any number of preceding civilizations. Knowing someone is an excavation thereof. Often painful."

"Very Freudian, Vita. I get it. But too often resulting just in an *ex*-."

"You sound like you're getting anxious about Mark."

"German poet Gottfried Benn got engaged some three months after his actress girl friend committed suicide. Too fast."

"It's been over two years since your husband died."

"Lawrence Sterne copied word for word love letters from his former wife and sent them to his new mistress."

"Mark wouldn't do that, given what you've told me of him."

"Another man has sent me a friend request. [I send her his profile.] Says he hails from Ukraine. Jewish, too. An 'auteur' as he puts it. Maybe I'm being too hasty with my relationship with Mark.

Too eager to hear Pachelbel's Canon in D Major. Need to play the field more."

"And?"

"And, handsome. But, he's a pipe smoker, though. A neat-looking pipe. Must say."

"So? A pipe can be awesome. Outside the home. Makes the guy look super dignified in public. And maybe, just maybe, that thing in his mouth isn't a pipe! *[laughs at her own joke]*."

"He's sixteen years younger than me. A documentary photographer, it seems."

"That's a problem !? The age. Really?"

"Probably not, really. But I think I do want Mark and I to take it slowly — if it's going to last — so we can grow roots on a ground that can be trusted and not shoot up like young bamboo in bad soil. Especially in these times of troubling troubles."

"And an ever-recurring shit load of hurricanes. Poor Louisiana."

"So you aren't going to follow up on . . ."

"Nope. A bit tempted though. Nevertheless. But. Still. And. Like I'm tempted by Fruit of the Forest Pie: apples, rhubarb, red raspberries, blackberries. But which isn't on my recommended Weight Watcher's diet."

"Pic, [*abruptly changing the topic*] I'm reading some depressing novel. In one dismal chapter it takes seventy-nine pages for dawn to break on Jack and Della's relational death-style."

"Can't listen now. Have to say bye-bye. Need to pick up my prescription.

"The Dean of Western Writers," Wallace Stegner (d. 1993), says a place becomes a place when it meets 2 criteria: 1) things have happened there and remembered in various ways; 2) it has been given a high level attention, at best poetic. Such has been my Oak Park "Garden of Song." Not "Intimate Immensity" (Gaston Bachelard) like certain locales here in New Mexico, like the Piedra Lumbre (Shining Stone) basin (gateway to the Colorado plateau) and home to Ghost Ranch, but intimate. A green place shared by Noonie and I. Worked in by us both over years of hard knee-bending labor. Work. But then enjoyed. By the dogs, too. Our hot tub. Sitting in with Peach Schnapps. The pond with koi we named. The sub-zero polar vortex that arrived and stayed a week. Killed all the koi. The flowers. Lush. The memories of candle-light dinners. The grandkids playing among the plants, trying to catch butterflies with nets. Their fascination with fireflies. The spectacular birthday party the kids arranged for the dogs there. House guests. Their amazement. Family group photos. A family mythic place. Noonie sleeping on the chaise at noon. Dogs on either side of. Getting up a bit dazed. Stepping off the deck into the flower bed. L'heure bleu bliss together. Prosecco with Aperol. Come April until closing the garden in late October. A nature poem written on the west wall bordering my master project.



Abiquiu Lake (dam formed, ecology destroying reservoir) Picky Hunting.

Speaking of Ghost Ranch. In 1927 Richard Leroy Pfaffle of Alcade, New Mexcio won in a poker game a homestead in the Yeso Canyon near the Rio Chama. A location beside colored cliffs and snuggled next to a mesa plateau. He gave the deed for the property to his wife, former Bostonian of some note, Carol Bishop Stanley Pfaffle. The homestead, the Ranch of the Witches (later to become Ghost Ranch), had

once been a haven for a den of

murderous cattle thieves known to locals as *Los Animales*. People talked of dark crimes. Ghosts of the murdered wandering. A mythic deadly serpent *brujo*, Vivaron, a 34-foot long rattlesnake (did someone measure it?) living under a spectacular geological formation named Orphan Mesa. After the Pfaffles divorced, Carol Stanley took up residence at the ramshackle homestead at Yeso in 1931, developed it into a dude ranch. Her most prominent, perennial guest after 1940? Georgia O'Keefe. Some 90 years later, I move to Santa Fe, a grieving widow. Also braving the southwest alone. Mothballing my more elegant Chicago couture, buying more practical garb. Been reading about this enterprising Carol Bishop Stanley in Lesley Poling-Kempes' *Ghost Ranch*. She — a real cultural force during the 20s



Rio Chama Bend by Rick Young.



Rio Chama view which artist Rick Young painted.

started in the early 1980s titled U-Turn.

and 30s, leading up O'Keeffe's arrival — dubbed the place a "Perfectly mad looking country." The book is a must read to fully understand Stegner's rich concept of place.

Armed with such knowledge, I take Lexstacy up to Espanola, up US 84 through Abiquiu to the Rio Chama to the dam and Lake Abiquiu. See Cerro Pedernal ("Flint Hill"), a slender, angular mountain southwest of Ghost Ranch, a favorite O'Keeffe subject.

The "Faraway Nearby" Georgia O'Keeffe called Ghost Ranch. Now *that's* "Intimate Immensity" for you. Sites of immense geological time (150,000,000 years) inscribed in startling Triassic Chinle Formation. A quest — to seeking the very spot artist Rick Young a few years ago sat to paint the Rio Chama landscape now hanging in my living room. I find it. At a small scenic pull-off overlooking the Rio Chama. The U-shaped bend calls to mind Noonie's logo an art mag he

On my way home I swing Lexstacy into Abiquiu's long famous Bode's General Store's large parking lot. The only store in miles. It sells necessities for locals, while catering to visitors. The staff stand behind the counters in their Bode's T-shirts, exude pride in their jobs. "A gift shop in the back of Bode's offers books, stickers, pot holders, and other knickknacks, and of course you'll spy the *de rigueur* postcard racks. Pick up an order of highly-praised Red Chile Fries (like a Frito pie but switch Frito chips for french fries)," reads a tourist booklet.

I do. Pick up an order. A pile of cheese, carne asada, chiles, fries start my taste buds fiesta-dancing. Wow! Or as the Latina teenager sitting at another outside picnic table under a tree near me yells, gulping down a portion of same: "AWESOME!...*Mamà*, some?" The girl's mother takes a fork full of the sacred mixture, gasps as for air, tosses her burrito, and trots back into Bode's, having a "I'll-have-what-she's-having" epiphany.

When I arrive home, Snowy and Duffy bounce about me, wanting their food. I tell them of my adventures today.



Death. Denver. Pepper spray versus a Sig Sauer P320 RXP series pistol. Tatted Trumper versus media-hired topgun. Not like an EverTrumper to bring just a spray bottle to a shoot out at the It-Ain't OK Corral. Like Wyatt's brother "Morg" Earp in the legendary morbid tale, this dead

The It-Ain't-OK-Corral face-off: "Fake News" versus Trump Creed becomes Real Life feed from Denver, Co.

dude's now in the morgue, danger-man tattoos already starting to shrivel.

But good news, too. Today, October 11, is:

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL.





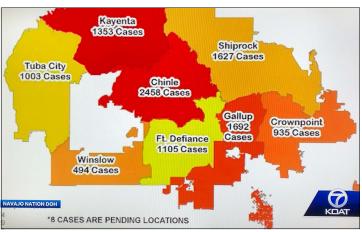
I put up a visually rich congratulatory posting to my biracial grandchild on my Facebook. A post Noonie would simply mathematize as: (Hallmark card + Georgia O'Keeffe portrait + congrats + emoji) ³.

Mary, Flo, Vitalina, Valentina — all send me and my grandkid a salute of solidarity. Especially relevant given the

threat to women's rights by the creepy Supreme Court nominee. Something about that strange look in her eyes. I imagine it on billboards across the nation. Big Sister is watching.

* * *





COVID statistics for the Navajo Nation as of October 12, 2020, Indigenous Peoples Day in New Mexico.



"Ogha Po'oge" is the Indigenous, Tewa term for the city named "Santa Fe" by Spanish colonists. The Tewa language is spoken by the modern-day Puebo people.

It is Columbus Day. No. Strike that. It is Indigenous Peoples Day here in New Mexico.

Strong feelings here about the Spanish Conquest and the resulting cruelty to the First Peoples living here. A focal point for this issue has been the obelisk in Santa Fe Plaza which celebrates the settler's victory over the "savage Indians". Awhile back two protesters chained themselves to this obelisk to protest the New Mexico capital's failure to remove the celebration of settler victory. Finally, in June 2020, Santa Fe Mayor Alan Webber pledged to remove the monument, which was erected in 1866. Some people not happy about this. People of Spanish descent wish to celebrate their heritage.



Your Vote: Democrat or Stupid?

These lands have been bitterly contested: Navajo intrusion into Hopi land. Spanish into Native lands, Anglos into Spanish and Native lands. During the Civil War a Confederate Army was repelled by Union forces at Glorieta Pass (see page 193), and now Cowboys for Trump versus Liberals. And then there is the always present tension between longtime Mexican residents and the retiring Anglos flooding in. Due to the lockdown, celebrations today will be minimal.



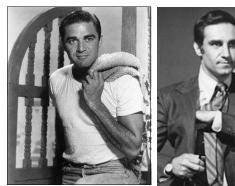
Santa Fe Plaza obelisk pulled down by a mob of protestors.

BREAKING NEWS.

After more than 150 years in the Santa Fe Plaza, Monday night a controversial monument no longer stands; It comes after 3 days of protests. Two men were arrested in connection to the toppling of the obelisk. The 2 men arrested were Sean Sunderland, 24, who is charged with resisting and criminal trespass, and Dylan

Wrobel, 27, who is charged with battery on a peace officer and resisting an officer. Monday night, Mayor Alan Webber condemned the incident in the Plaza saying "There is no place for people taking the law into their own hands and there is no place for people destroying historic monuments on their own."

I'm sitting in my TV chair. Still in my nightgown. A blanket over me. A cold wave has descended. Still 40 degrees out. My radiant floor heat hasn't caught up to the temperature drop yet. I lift my blanket. Flare my nostrils. Odor. It's a recognition of The Real. An olfactory fact. The smell of pre-shower. Night sweat. Thigh stink. Feet stink. A dollop of underarm odor on top. Bad breath. Depressing. I'll shower later. The unlawful removel of the Plaza's obelisk stinks. Should've been done legally. Gives the likes of the Cowboys for Trump ammunition for their law-and-order platform. Bad press for liberal causes.



Steve Cochran.

Tony Lo Bianco.

I watch a news segment on businesses affected by the lockdown and people's creative solutions to keep money rolling in. The female reporter starts interviewing a female business owner in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Then I watch an old film noir recorded from the Movies Channel last night, *Highway 301* (1950), starring Steve Cochran as a psychotic heist man — he looks like a young Tony Lo Bianco who also starred in a

crime film *The Seven-Ups* (1973). Such an uncanny a resemblance, I mistook Cochran for a young Lo Bianco. People were always mistaking Noonie for someone else over the years. One evening, he was taken for: 1) a top Chicago lawyer (at dinner); and, 2) the president of the Chicago's Lyric Opera (at the opera). Now *that* freaked me out.

Highway 301 opens with a dramatic bank robbery in — guess! — Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Odd choice of place. It's usually Los Angeles or New York or Chicago or Kansas City. And what a coincidence! Comic toss of the dice, huh? These sort of far-fetched coincidences haunted Noonie's life, now mine. I haven't heard of Winston-Salem in years. I only associate Winston cigarettes, Salem cigarettes, with that name. Why is that name entering my life now? I'm sure Valentina would have an opinion. Mark? Mary? But I'm too embarrassed to run this oddity past them.

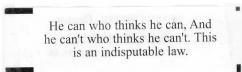
A quick Google search and I find out that Winston was a Revolutionary War hero; that Salem derives from the Hebrew *shalom*, meaning "peace". Odd juxtaposition of war and peace, an agon of terms *bridged* by a hyphen. A current prominent citizen of Winston-Salem is named William L. Bridges. And. Winston-Salem police are today investigating a deadly



I cut a deck of cards and up came the black ace of spades, the Death Card.

stabbing under a bridge there. I am going to an Albuquerque oral surgeon this afternoon to see if my bad teeth repair will require a bridge. I don't play bridge, the card game. People are always asking if I do. Friends tell me, every bridge player fantasizes about the perfect hand — being dealt the 13 cards of one suit — and the perfect game, in which each of the four players receives all 13 cards of one suit. Numerical Noonie would argue the number 13 here enhances the significance of the other facts sketched above. I cut a deck of cards and get — oh shit — the Death Card. Like maybe I am going to have bad luck?

I remember I have 1 Chinese fortune cookie I didn't eat yet. I open it and read what advice it offers:



This bolsters my confidence. But then I suddenly recall tomorrow is the 13th and I have a 1 p.m. (1300 hours in military time) dental appointment in Albuquerque. Not a good omen. So many 13s! Maybe I should take Hwy 14, the Turquoise Trail, a scenic slow route south into ABQ rather than the expressway where large 4 x4 trucks rage along at 90 m.p.h. Safer route is nice, but only a single lane. I might get behind a very slow truck or hit road construction and so be late for my appointment. Torn, I let a coin toss determine the route. Heads — the expressway it is, then.



Snowy and Duffy waiting to vote.

I grab the antibiotics my oral surgeon prescribed, which I picked up 2 days ago and, after praying *Shema Yisrael Adonai eloheinu Adonai ehad*, boldly head south on Hwy 25 to ABQ for my dental procedure. Dogs are in their mutt hole, snugged in their brand new, soft beds. I plan on returning home via the Turquoise Trail, Hwy 14. May I return safely to the dogs now sporting their new BIDEN / HARRIS bandanas

The expressway traffic is light. Lucky. Lexstacy's GPS negotiates past ugly strip malls and gets me to my dental appointment safely and on time. Staff are friendly. They tell me my dentist, Dr. Mitchell, is the great-great-grandson of famous aviator and supporter of air power General Billy

Mitchell. William Lendrum Mitchell to be precise (d. 1936). A man who shot and wounded his wife during a marital tiff and who was later court marshalled for "Conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline and in a way to bring discredit upon the military service," for challenging the competence of his superiors (sounds like Noonie's tousle with the admin-types at his school). His rank for reduced to being a permanent colonel. But his vision of the importance of air power was prescient and his passionate vision for a separate Air Force was later realized. The World War II B-25 Mitchell bomber was named after him. Truman further honored him with the posthumous rank of Brigadier General. I tell him both my deceased husband and his father were in the Air Force.

My oral procedure — removal to 2 adjacent cracked teeth — goes smoothly. No pain. I take the antibiotics. The doc gives me a painkiller. I must return to have a bridge put in the following week. Another follow-up appointment next week. Thanks and leave.

Returning on the single-lane Turquoise Trail route is slower, but rich in breathtaking views and interesting little towns than the expressway. Today is the anniversary of the premiere of Debussy's *La Mer* (October 15, 1905). KHFM classical radio is playing this minor scale masterpiece. The day of its premiere, *La Mer* perplexed its audience. The critics were not kind in their reviews: "crafty," incomprehensible and lacking in grandeur, sharp sonority and often unpleasant." According to François Lesure, "No work by Debussy suffered as greatly because of the chasm between its original ideas and its cold reception by audiences for years."

As the sea-sounds of *La Mer* swell inside Lexstacy, I turn off Hwy40 onto Hwy 14 and drive north past the Tinkertown Museum in Sandia Park. I looked this place up yesterday in my guide book, which told me: "It took Ross Ward over 40 years to carve, collect, and lovingly construct what is now Tinkertown Museum. His miniature wood-carved figures were initially part of a traveling exhibit, driven to county fairs and carnivals



in the 1960s and '70s. Today over 50,000 glass bottles form rambling walls that surround a 22-room museum decorated with wagon wheels, old fashioned store fronts, and wacky western memorabilia making Tinkertown's exterior as much as a museum as the wonders within — the woodcarvings of Ross Ward."

But closed now. Like so many museums I want to visit.



The Great Wave (1831) Hokusai

Closed. Except the landscape — it's open. And I mean OPEN. Vast. A sea of rolling hills, a backdrop of mesas. The Turquoise Trail, driving north, is the visual landscape equivalent to enjoying Debussy's musical interpretation of the vast sea. Sight and sound mesh in perfect harmony as I race along newly laid asphalt in ecstacy in Lexstacy. All the earth colors: yellow through the ochres, orange, red, and purple earth, dotted with the greens and yellows of Fall.

A veritable painters palette touching sand hills, buttes, spires, stone-strewn arroyos.

I pull over at an overlook into a vastness and primal silence, except for Debussy's 1st movement, "*De l'aube à midi sur la mer*" (From dawn to noon on the sea), a capricious, shimmering, subtle evocation of the sea as the sun shines above. Just as the sun now shines above the landscape I'm standing before. The composer asked that *The Wave* by Japanese engraver Hokusai be used as a cover for the score. The rising and undulating waves in that image seem to have been translated into rock and soil extending in all directions along the Turquoise Trail upon which I sail homeward.

Debussy had aspirations to become a painter. O'Keeffe comes to mind (she loved classical music). Her adoration of landscape such as I am driving through. But also her stubborn need for solitude, the opposite of my need for companionship. She was bored with company. I come alive with same. She came west for solitude, fleeing Alfred Stieglitz's veritable diarrhea-of-the-mouth monologues. Can't blame her. I came seeking a life partner.

I reign in Lexstacy for lunch in Madrid at a famous place. Great chow. Green chili cheese burger, onion rings, and tap beer at The Mine Shaft. No. I just had oral surgery. So have to opt for a black bean soup. I mash the soft beans up with my spoon and refuel myself for the 45 minute drive home.



Wall mural (detail) inside The Mine Shaft.

Near the exit, I notice a large wall mural portrait. Much surprise because it is the *same* image that Vitalina has for her profile picture on Facebook. She's copped someone's artwork! As I cross the street to get a sweet gourmet coffee, I notice a street sign that, given the pandemic, reads very ominous (see photo below). The increasing COVID deaths come to mind. New Mexico's highest 1-day increase of 577 new cases rattles me. Alone is this vast landscape, I feel very vulnerable today.

I wish Mark was with me now.

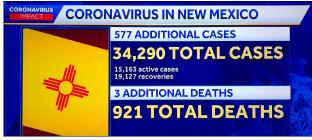
I wander into Java the Hut and order a small Mexican Mocha Latte (chocolate and whipped cream) from the young, masked Latina barista.

> While waiting for my order, I peruse the store. Notice a fantastic array of fridge magnets (see next page). I ask her permission to photograph the display.

"Si, señora."

The Mocha is outstanding. Mary recommended this place. I sit outside in the sun, the wind keeping me cool. I survey the street. A small number of tourists (clean shaven) mingle with locals (many bearded with tats). Madrid "funk" is the going style here. Houses, signs, post boxes, stores. All is charming in a tough, rough sort of way — colorful, political. A handmade sign tacked up on a crude bulletin board offers people





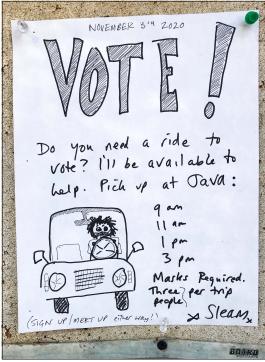
New Mexico coronavirus statistics (10/14/2020).

a ride to vote if they need one (see next page). I love this place. A kind of proto-Meow Wolf.

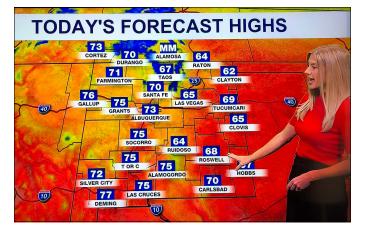
When I arrive home the sun is lightly brushing the sides of the adobe homes with a glow, casting long shadows. It is always a welcoming sight. I take a deep breath and thank myself for moving here. Inside, I immediately call Mark. No answer. Ten minutes later. Still no answer. I go online to see our local Bulletin Board postings. One stands out. Makes me smile: *Our rescued parakeet has an extremely overgrown beak which hits his throat. Does anyone know how to trim it?*



Java the Hut fridge magnets (2020) Picky Hunting.



Model Citizen's Posted Note, Madrid, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.





Another cold front is descending. It was in the 40s when I let the dogs out this morning. On GMA news, chilling data on the Qanon conspiracy phenomenon. A form of mass psychosis. I wonder if the FBI knows who injected this data virus into our national consciousness. Russian agents? A right-wing IT think-tank?

To hold the "secret" to something, be part of a group "in-the-know" is psychologically seductive. A person dealt out of life's game by class and education, can find themselves dealt back into the



The Immanent Baboon spreads "truthful hyperbole," dissension, failing to denounce Qanon, whose members support him.

game. Made to feel "special". To have a sitting President verify your delusion . . .

Conspiracy theories have always been around, but in the 1980s those of a ring-wing ilk (Black helicopters, Trilateral Commission, Dark State, etc.) were being spread by word-

of-mouth and on amateur "ham" radio networks, later the Internet. Films like *National Treasure* (2004) and *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) further popularized the search for signs of something *deeper, hidden*. A popularization of postmodern theory's notion of "the play of the signifiers." Games, fiction — like Reality TV — ripe material for political manipulation. As Jean Baurdrillard theorized, we live in the era of simulations. There was a liberating aspect to PoMo theory in its early days — its attack on "master narratives" that bind us — but now many aspects of that theory have been refunctioned for right-wing purposes. The line between truth and falsity blurred. Lies repeated until they become "truths."



Val, my hairdresser, with her "thing" for alternative medicine, astrology, and so forth, is a more benign example. Lately, her "thing" is *connectcosmotomics*. How the entirety of the connections among neurons in the brain affects one's hair's balance between health and disease. Moreover, how those connections, reflected in hair health, may determine if one is a conservative or liberal. An e-mail from her today contains an attached reminder to vote sent by her friend



Izanami Japanese Restaurant.



Isanami's Bento Box with wagyu teriyaki steak.

which she's passing on to her clients. Good-looking dude. Wonder if he's single? — making a mental note to ask Val. Am I wavering here? No call from Mark. No Answer when I call.

Angry. I decide to eat out *alone* at Izanami Japanese restaurant. It serves upscale izakaya fare — small plates served (with craft sake and beer) in a casual atmosphere. "We have the most beautiful (and safest) patio dining in Santa Fe," they boast. The restaurant is snuggled up into the Sangres behind Santa Fe, within the compound of famous Ten Thousand Waves spa, which is temporarily closed.

My outside table has a spectacular view of the mountains. I might be in Japan given its location. Fabulous service by a waiter who is a ceramicist who studied his art in Japan. I order the bento box for the wagyu steak. Every offering in the box is superb. A craft beer completes my meal.

This morining I am lazing on my bed with the dogs reading about Ghost Ranch. A tragedy there. Mary Duncan, a beloved nanny on the ranch, was gored to death by a buck antelope in 1936. The poor animal was eventually shot. Later, its skull became famous when O'Keeffe used it as prop in her painting *Antelope Head with Pedernal* (1953). Skulls and bones intrigued her as subjects in her paintings. Given the prolonged drought of the 1930s, the New Mexican desert was strewn with scores of them and the cow hands at the ranch retrieved many for her. It seemed to prefigure the large number of deaths in New Mexican regiments when Japan invaded the Phillippines.



COVID cases in USA as of 10/16/2020.

During World War II, O'Keeffe extolled how Ghost Ranch became a haven from "the troubles of the world outside" which then seemed like "some mad illusion." And now my Santa Fean home is my haven from what also seems like a "mad illusion": the pandemic with over 8,000,000 cases in the USA as of today and the dire prognostications concerning the

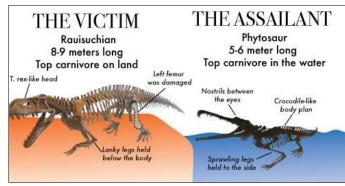
forthcoming election by the babbling Baboon. And still no word from Mark. I've left messages. I set aside Poling-Kempes' book to check my iPad for a message from Mark. He's sent me this disturbing note:

Beck, Call calling, now: Not even if I had ten mouths and tongues could've I described my recent illness properly. My head felt like it was about to explode. I could barely walk, breathing was strenuous, and chills shook my body. A neighbor of mine rushed me to Presbyterian where I was taken by wheelchair to a room that just that moment opened up with one bed available. Tests. Then I was removed to the COVID ICU. Helped in bed by a wonderful nurse. This is where I spent the next five days in a touch-and-go condition, deeply dazed and intermittently introspective — thinking about you, not wanting to worry you prematurely. I was given oxygen and shot after shot. My neighbor forgot to take my cell-phone when he brought me to the hospital, so I couldn't contact you easily. I was released today. My immune system kicked ass and kept me from getting a severe case. I am weak but seem to feel stronger by the hour. Still coughing a bit though, not easy to talk, so I'm writing this missive. Guess we will have to postpone our dinner date for awhile. Hugs, Call

I feel ashamed at doubting Mark's commitment to our relationship. Guilty for eating out, enjoying myself, getting a bit tipsy, when he was at the same time suffering. "I wish I could be there for you now," I write back. Will I be able to sleep tonight?



Phytosaur skull. Species of fossil found in the Piedra Lumbre badlands.



Skulls. Death. Dinosaurs. Victim. Assailant. Patient. COVID. Call. Bones. Skulls. Death. Dinosaurs. Victim. Assailant. Patient. COVID. Call.

Bones.

Words that carom about my brain (having fun with his dyslexia, Noonie called his "my Brian"). Since reading about large Phytosaur skulls and Coelophysis skeletons found not far from Ghost Ranch* was followed by reading about Call's close call

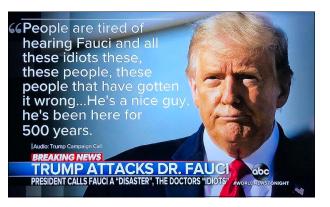
A Triassic reptile whose remains were found near Ghost Ranch.

with COVID, complex neutronal rhizomes are forming today in my *cabeza*. My hair brush has, this morning, taken larger amounts of my fur from my red-haired bob than ever before. Stress?

Last night. A disturbing nightmare. I am caught in the worst forest fire in Colorado's history — life born from spark — as a camper waking up at night to be surrounded by towering flames on the mountains circling the campsite (there was some dramatic event like this featured on the 10 p.m. news). Me, victim; fire, assailant. Unmanageable chaos around me — fire trucks, screaming campers, kids running holding teddy bears. I remember Noonie telling me — he was made a junior fire marshal in the 8th grade and still stalked our Oak Park home once a year for fire hazards — "When in a fire situation, listen to what the fire is telling you, Picky; be respectful to the way it needs to live, how it consumes and breathes." I see a tall fireman standing near his truck, in full gear, yelling over his radio:

^{*} The Abiquiu area, 220, 000,000 years ago, was a tropical wet land. Vivaron, the mythic snake mentioned earlier, had a basis in fact: a coiled skeleton of a 20 feet long Phytosaur was found near Orphan Mesa in 1934. Later, on June 22, 1947 (2 days after Noonie 's birth), a major find: layers upon layers of Triassic era Coelophysis fossils (6 to 8 feet long in adult form) unearthed from the red sands beneath the towering stone cliffs of Piedra Lumbre. These fossils were an early form of dinosaur, ancestor to those of the Jurassic age. The dig found a perfect sampling: juveniles, young adults, full-grown adults, elderly adults — mostly likely a result of stream action on carcasses that built up the deposit of so many skeletons.

"There's more traffic than the Tac can handle!" then he says something about "wind shifting" and "down the flank and at the head." I feel my hair being singed by the extreme heat. I wake myself up yelling: "Call, call the fire department for more fire men!" I'm in a sweat. Duffy and Snowy are barking. I can smell the smoke blowing down from the Pine Gulch Fire in Colorado through my open window. Probably what contributed to the dream. Death by fire or drowning my greatest fear. My Orwellian "Room 101".





A KINDER, GENTLER POLITICS? COMPETING CANDIDATES APPEAR IN AN AD TOGETHER



I shower. Feed dogs. Make blueberry pancakes. Turn on GMA. While our fire-fighter heroes are attacking the wild fires in the West, the Immanent Baboon is attacking the hero-doctors trying to fight COVID XIX. Dr. Fauci is receiving death threats in large part due to Trump's loose tongue. The magnitude of this national disgrace ... well ... it's hard to stomach it.

On the other hand, in Utah. the 2 opposing candidates for governor are appearing in the same political ad, showing solidarity as Americans, even as they voice their differing political platforms. Refreshing. A direct rebuke of the Baboon's maniacal, hate-filled aping about and chest thumping.

What's on my agenda for today? Calling Call. Beckoning him to open up about his feelings when he was in the ICU, COVID XIX attacking him. In his youth, he climbed Nevado Pisco, a mountain in Peru; needed no supplementary oxygen, even at 18,000 feet. Quite a feat. Strong lungs. Good immune system. Why he survived this bout with His Evil Majesty, death, I think.

*

*

*

26.0

My thumb flicks across my iPad screen, scrolling through Yelp reviews, blog posts (including a biting Yersinia Pestis Walter Winchell-ish exposé of academic elites contra part-time faculty), eventually arriving at this morning's odd posting on NextDoor Aldea:

MISSING TORTOISE:

Tortoise. Hey, so, is anyone missing their tortoise? My house sitter just sent me this pic. Let me know! Update: it sounds like a neighborhood mom and kiddo wheeled it away in a wagon and are also posting on NextDoor.



The errant tortoise.



Il Piatto restaurant on Marcy St. closes.

Very interesting. A pre-election blitz by the Baboon and this highly symbolic creature appears among us? A coincidence? A toss of the cosmic dice? The tortoise is a symbol of wisdom and knowledge, and is able to defend itself on its own. *In this corner Shell-game Tortoise; in the other corner, Miscreant Baboon!* Taking bets on who wins.

For Southwest tribes such as the Hopi and Navajo it represents water — a much sought after

commodity in desert regions. It also represents the Earth Mother, her stoic ability to carry the



heavy burden of humanity on her shell. It represents the opposite of the spirit of Two Hearts's dirty campaign.

Another post on our neighborhood bulletin board mourns the death of a good Italian eatery, Il Piatto. These Space For Rent signs are popping up all over Santa Fe's downtown. Treasured venues for excellent food, bakery items, art, jewelry, ceramics, all dying off, victims of COVID XIX. This reigning king isn't even content to "Let them eat cake!" A decimation of what makes Santa Fe a haven for the good life. Gone. Along with scores of jobs. And hope.

For every For Rent sign there are a

number of people suffering financial loss. Depression. Maybe even suicide. All this sickens me. *Oh save us Sacred Turtle. We are Biden our time*.

The next Aldean post gets even weirder:

May you, your friends and family stay safe by taking the proper precautions as we head into confusing and troubling times as we watch a pandemic unfold with COVID-19. Could there be something more profound occurring with all of this? May we be seeing the signs of the times being revealed? Could this be a door of opportunity for people to open up their hearts to what God desires for us to hear? If you watch the news stations on TV, you may have seen on the NBC news channel just months ago concerning the implantable RFID microchip that is gaining ground in Sweden where people are getting this microchip implanted in their hand.

Would you allow a microchip to be placed inside your body that has the ability to track where you go and what you do? How about if you knew it matched perfectly with Bible prophecy where God warns us not to take it during the future reign of the Anti-Christ, otherwise we will receive the fullness of His wrath (*Revelation* 14:9-11)? This may be the most important message you will read in these times. . . please do not ignore this! This message reveals what the Mark of the Beast is, and the meaning behind counting a number people have been pondering for centuries, 666. This is truly a message from God!

Oh, boy. Just then a big blast of west wind hits my office's blinds. Knocks on my window loudly, rhythmically, like God is sending me a coded message" *Find what you love, love what you find.* At least that's what I hope it means. In this time of extreme political strife, my thoughts wander to the simple fact that I love this Country, love it like I love Noonie, a spouse whose failings I was constantly forgiving, and whose kindness and virtues I cherished over the long haul. A haul that took us to the brink of deadly cancer. The potentials and promise of our beginnings together. And now remember with such vividness. Noonie and Country. Noonie and Cancer.



Noonie after a successful parotid gland extraction, October 30, 2011.

Outside. Aspen leaves bright yellow. Those fallen tinkle like copper in the breese. An antidote to the dark evil flying about the Heartland spreading lies and hate. Fall when my heart turns most deeply to thoughts of my deceased husband, So many of our romantic trips occur in that season. Our 1st travel date: to see Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture in Spring Green, Wisconsin and compare it to the bizarre tourist trap The House on the Rock. But there was also his cancer diagnosis, my fear, his successful surgery on Halloween 2011, a long surgical scar making him look like a Halloween ghoul.

I love over-the-top Halloween displays with big spiders in their webs, nasty ghouls reaching at you, mock

graves, bats, large inflated plastic pumpkins, real carved pumpkins with evil grins. This year, my grandkids's front stoop will feature a hilarious carved caricature of the Baboon. I don't think there will be much Trick-or-Treating here in Aldea. Not much last year, pre-COVID, either. Not many children in Aldea.

There is 1 masseuse though. An immigrant from Luang Prabang, Laos. Her office

is across the street from the Aldea Plaza, a short walk from my house. Val recommends her. The upscale spas around Santa Fe have been shut down with the rise in coronavirus cases. I have been very tense, what with Call's close call with death, my fear of catching it, and the approaching election. Some professional body relaxation, anointing hands to chase away ghosts of depression, beckons me. Her practice has received praises for its observance of COVID health regulations. I call and get an afternoon appointment for "The Prolonged Pro-Bang" full-body treatment, an hour of bliss for \$75 (1st time customer discount).

Legs oiled, Bane (her Laotian name means "long awaited child") works up the back of my legs, to my buttocks, then to my back and shoulders. Pulls down on my shoulders, works each vertebrae, deeply. Bane ends with my hands and feet. My feet being most sensitive to a good massage. Between the intimate space of US, lies the center of the universe. Done. I can barely stand so relaxed am I. She is the bane of all bodily tension. The evil spirits have flown my muscles. Blood rushes to my Brian brain in pure joy.

It is so pleasant to have close physical contact. Bane's next client won't be here for an hour, so we sit and chat — our social-distance now like a vast valley between us. She tells me she and her parents, small shop keepers, "fled the chaos in Laos in 1975 when a Communist state was established and went to Sweden when I was five. As Lao Tzu say: 'Journey of a thousand miles begin with a single step.' There I learn Swedish, now English and some Spanish. Thoughts now nearly my own. I learn Swedish massage, too. Too cold during long winters. Stockholm, I think, means in Swedish 'Stay-at-Home,' so much I don't leave house due to weather, but for work. After parents were killed in a car crash, decide to immigrant to the States. I think I can make more money in the U.S. than in socialist place. But I didn't want to go to Wisconsin or Minnesota where so many Hmung settle," she tells me. "Too cold there. Crazy. New Mexico dry and hot. Fit in here better with my Asian looks. Look like I belong. I be now here near thirty years. Marry Mex man. Two kids."

She admits to voting Republican in the past, but now is vehemently anti-Trump. "Trump just one bad *caudillo*." She speaks some Spanish. "He invade you emotional life, make you wanta think he invulnerable. Like catch virus and not die. He a kind of murderer using virus to kill people of color, like bad people in Laos and Cambodia do."

I don't use this as an opportunity to probe into her early years in Laos, not wanting to stir up what might be bad childhood memories. Instead, I sidetrack our conversation to more immediate issues. I tell her about the very loud coyote howling I heard last night about 10 p.m. "Scared the shit outta me," I tell her.

"No laugh. One of my client's . . . her dog was taken by a devil coyote last year. You have dog?" I segue into a 15-minute praise of my cute canines. Finally, I bid Bane byebye and walk home downhill. Muscle glee. My whole body celebrates its looseness. I feel years younger. *Picky, ya shoulda gotten this treat treatment months ago. But I was afraid* of contracting the virus with such close contact.

The west wind has picked up now. I look for the weather vane on top of our H.O.A. building. In vain. It's not there. In fact, now that I think of it, it was *never* there. Ah,

memory, fake news from my Brian brain. A noisy flapping to my left. It's 3 plastic bags trapped in chamisa (rubber rabbitbrush) branches; next to this non-biodegradable tangle, 2 empty plastic water bottles. Evian, I think. Must be from workers doing house construction nearby; residents here are not likely to litter. Just neglect to pickup dog doo.



I arrive home in time to catch the 4 p.m. KOAT News, featuring a postdebate story on Biden versus Trump stats by states. In the Southwest (not Florida) polling shows Latinx voters favoring Biden by a large margin. Good. Biden's performance last night, powerful, no nonsense. Bedrock ethical solidarity about him; capacity for compassion and

a calm voice. Basically, what Bane tells me attracts her to vote for him. "Not nice people like Trump govern Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos, even Thailand, too."

At a point during the debate, I think the Baboon's response to Biden's accusation about the treatment of Hispanic kids separated from their families was "Good!" Outraged, I post immediately on Facebook about it. Only to see my post removed as "inaccurate data."

Okay, so His Pants actually mumbled "Gowahead," which, already primed by the Baboon's infamous dislike of these "illegals", and given my hearing loss, I mistakenly took as his approval of policy. It *is good* to see fake news being slapped down by the social media



giants. Ironic that I was targeted. I've been humbled. If I was an ex-Catholic like Noonie, I'd say: *Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.* But, of course, we all know at heart Two Hearts doesn't give a damn about those poor families. If he'd expressed con-

cern over the situation, it would appear to be as *good* as "adding screen doors to a submarine" (a Noonie expression).

The big local news today is the fast approaching winter storm. Bane won't like it. Colorado hopes it will douse their deadly fires. It means I will have to attend to my garden, try to save some plants, cover outdoor furniture, cut my last bouquet for my kitchen table.



Nationally — shit some 83,000 new coronavirus cases today! And the Immanent Baboon declares we are "turning a corner," it's going away! The mesmerized followers clap. The Right retreats into various interpretative communities, refusing information that challenges their dark biases.

Dueling world pictures, different sources of information. Some argue 2020 is as divisive as the 1860 election prior to the Civil War. The Republican Party akin to being a new Confederacy, pushing racism and white male values. Will this disease prove fatal to our democracy?

That massage has been the bane to my pain, relaxed me — Bane played some of my favorite music, Mahler's 4th Symphony conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas. while working on me — but not my political attention. I remind myself that the decisions of the body politic are borne by the bodies of the vulnerable, like Bane and her hardworking husband, a PNM lineman. Otherwise, I might vomit. As Vita has warned me: "You want to see the real-world effects of policy, visit a Res. If this clown gets another four years, it'll become another four years after that, and we'll all be living at the level of Indigenous populations. The Res is in *your* future — vote."



As I was recalling this dire prediction of hers, Vita calls me. Good timing. Wants to update me on that new performance work of hers, *Ooo-Boo, Raw* (see page 226). She wants it to have the punch an earlier piece she did had. In *Every Pink Ribbon Looks Like the Flag of a Conqueror Stuck in a Woman's Grave* (2017), she lambasted the often corporate-backed, ultra-

feminine, infantilizing use of the pink ribbon. "Did you know, Picky, that one company even had the gall to have their fracking drills painted pink!" She's excited this time because she really is excited about hitting the Trump-As-Sexual-Predator theme in her new podcast. We discuss the seemingly amazing fact that in both the cases of Trump and Johnson in Britain, their narrative of sexual dominance over women has not done much to kill their chances of achieving political success; in fact, the opposite:

"We're witnessing a new sexualization of politics, Picky. A celebration of promiscuity, anti-feminist shit. Trump brags about his conquests. A naughty dude who charms due to his sexual adventures. When asked who was going to replace Ruth Bader Ginsburg, he made the outline of a woman with his hands. And then there's that jerk in Britain, Boris Johnson. His first name is Russian! Trump likes Russians. 'Bore-Us' is the first unmarried politico to reside at 10 Downing Street. And he refuses to say how many illegitimate children he's fathered. Makes him sexy. I fear the sinister connection these two will form in the years hence, if Trump wins again."

"Yeah, Vita, something way other than the usual 'repressive desublimation,' the term Herbert Marcuse used for the post-World War Two way Capitalism uses a mix of technology and partially satiated consumer desires to neutralize working-class revolt. Which, by the way, has worked. Workers, once liberal, are now conservative and electing people whose policies ultimately screw them. I sure see your point."

"Going too far is the point, Picky. Transgression is the draw and the appeal of predators. A play between 'naughty-naughty' and 'It's OK'. Ya grok?"

"Uh-huh. And transgression always carries with it a nice dollop of sexual tremor."

"Don't I know! [*I imagine her smiling, BIG.*] And no more than in the context of a prevailing call for a return to supreme moralism, Ms. P. Note the 'law and order' agenda of Trump, his ass-kissing of Fundamentalists. He holding up that Bible. Flouting the law while pretending to defend it. He knows how to work an audience."

"Vita, it's apt that the Jerry Falwell, Jr. scandal took place. One helluva sexual fall from grace. It's a truism of psychoanalysis that the law always nurtures the likelihood of its own demise; the superego, the law inside our head, is too tyrannical to be obeyed with any consistency. Norman O. Brown, a prominent social philosopher, in his 1959 book *Life Against Death* holds that repression not only leads to individual neurosis, but to social pathology. Witness the nutty state of way too many people these days. By the way, he was born in Mexico, Brown was."

"And don't I know it! Ms. P. Brown admired Marcuse (not the other way around, though). I read Brown's *Love's Body* in college; it was right next to my bed." [*I imagine a large smile again.*]

"In *Love's Body*, Brown developed his discussion of sexuality toward a more mystical engagement. Why Marcuse attacked that book for abandoning rational arguments in favor of aphorism, poetry, and free association."

"Of course, why I and other counter-cultural types found it a tasty read."

"Vita, have to go. My son is trying to FaceTime me. It's his birthday today.

"Gotcha. I need to do some research anyway. An old teach of mine just sent me a dog-eared copy of a strange book. *Alien Phenomenology*. Just because I live in a state famous for the Roswell Incident, I suppose. It's subtitle is "or What It's Like to Be a Thing." Shit. Us women certainly know what *that* feels like! Bye.

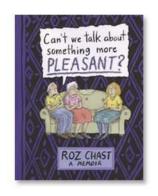
"Vita, not sure that book has much to do with UFOs. Something about not saying to the E.T., 'Do you come in peace?' But what am I to you?'

"Well, to me you're a good friend, Picky. You really listen to me. Most don't."

"Muchas gracias."



Tiki bar drinks at Hala Kahiki. Mother and son birthday celebration (2017).



Yes. October 24th. My son is 52 today. Hard to believe. He came out of my body that long ago. I massaged him out. Mahler's 4th — my 1st husband played that tape of mine during my delivery. My baby arrived without a whimper. Doctor had to whack his butt to get a response. Unlike my younger son who came out crying loudly. Prescient — each developed very different personalities.

I tell my son, I miss our Tiki Bar sojourns for the perfect tropical drink, a ritual we do each birthday. Yes, he's been laid-off, but has a prospect at a higher position within that same company, with more pay! Who has that kind of luck? Well, Noonie did. But most people, uh-uh.

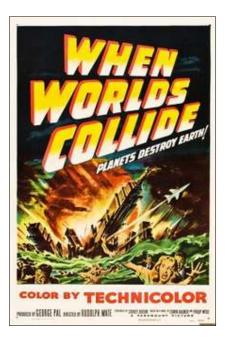
I wouldn't have moved here if either of my 2 sons had remained in Illinois. I assumed they'd be eager to visit me here, a southwest paradise. We hadn't anticipated something like The Reign of COVID XIX descending upon us, jailing us.

My son likes cinnamon, cheese, pimento, marzipan, whiskey, champagne, roses, craft beer and coffee, walking in sandals, tropical drinks, trains,

bar-hopping, good street food, jokes, Zen koans, Omakase sushi with sake, travel adventures, bold living, and graphic novels. So I got him for this birthday Roz Chast's *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* It's her well-illustrated memoir of her parents' old age and illness; heartbreaking but also tender and funny. Chast lovingly mines her parents' quirks, finds the humor in the hardest moments, and conveys a sense of near-palpable devotion. The ad for this book reads: "Anyone who's had to deal with declining parents will want to linger here." I thought it funny and appropriate to our current situation. So I bought it on Amazon. He tells me "I love it, Mom." I knew he would.

He's a solid Democrat. Wanted Bernie to win the primary. His life defines itself as an ironic stance against the logic of the supermarket and the scattering of desires that defines so many of us today. He practices "being out of sync." He's a tough and yet personable guy. Lives close to where George Floyd was murdered. Protests were only blocks from his house. Noonie once said if he'd had a son, he'd want him to be like my eldest. Meant a lot to me.

It's mom and son talk about the election, about the support the Dems are getting from young voters. We confess to each other how nervous we are about the election. "Ten



days until Baboon!" he says. An explanation is needed: in the 1951 sci-fi film by George Pal, *When Worlds Collide*, a rogue star, Bellus, is heading to destroy earth; a space ark is built to take a sampling of earthlings and earth culture to a new planet. Each day as the destroying planet comes closer, heard over the loudspeakers at the assembly point for the rocket are the words of doom: "100 days until Bellus ... 60 days to Bellus ... 20 days until Bellus ... 10 days until Bellus." The tension mounting as men struggle to build the space-ark. That's how my son and I feel. Now it's 10 days until our Bellus, until the 2 world views of Red versus Blue collide. Who will survive to run the country?

My son informs me that *When Worlds Collide* is 1 of the many films referenced in the

opening theme ("Science Fiction/Double Feature") of both the stage musical *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973) and its cinematic counterpart, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). Plus a "Sponge Bob" episode.

"Didn't know that." *I'll bet even Noonie didn't know that.* But I know Noonie knew *Deep Impact* (1998) and von Triers' *Melancholia* (2011) originated as a combination of *When Worlds Collide* and Arthur C. Clarke's novel *The Hammer of God* (1993).

My son and I blabber on. At a certain point, discussing my isolation here, he offers a comfort: "But you now have the right to hole up in a room — er, rooms — of your own.



Aunts Renee Goldberger and Sarah Goldberg.

To be queen of your time and silence. For years, as you know, mainly men had this luxury of holing up, getting lost so to speak. Ya gotta like it, in some way, right?"

Next, we're onto discussing my crazy aunts — Goldberger and Goldberg — whom we just call "The Goldenbergs". Sarah Goldberg was infamous in the family for the fact that on her wedding day, she locked herself in her room and refused to come out for hours.

"What a brouhaha that was," I tell him. Renee, in her 20s, made tons of money selling Amway household products. Paid for Columbia Law School. "Did I ever tell you a certain professor of hers only let women speak in class on what he called 'Ladies Day.' Imagine."



"Shit. I can still hear aunt Renee spouting off: 'Improve Everyday Life With Amway Nutrilite,' jeeze!" my son replies. "And then she would always exclaim her approval of something with 'Abzug-lutely!' Like if someone asked if she liked the Seder brisket, she'd say 'Abzug-lutely!' Wow."

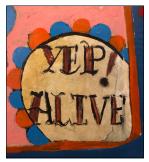
"Yes! A compliment to her favorite kickass woman politico, Bella Abzug. She was, as was Abzug, committed to *tikku olam* ['world repair,'the notion of social action and the pursuit of social justice], not to mention suffering a stress-eating disorder as did Abzug.".

"Yah, we could use some of that repair and improvement these days, mom."

"For sure, what with the Baboon still harping on the claims of voter fraud ahead and that fuckin' Enabler-in-Chief Bill Barr running loose. Bar Bill, bar Bill, bar Bill from ..."

"At least we're *alive*, mom."

"Indeed. But after the confirmation of Barrett tomorrow, maybe not, huh?"



Yep, Alive (Madrid, NM, 2020) Picky Hunting.

"Look, I'm sending you, via Amazon, a Halloween gift. A just-published book titled *Let's Talk About Your Wall: Mexican Writers Respond to the Immigration Crisis.* It'll keep your mind focused on issues we *can* change."

"Thanks," I say. We hang up. Do I feel rebooted? Abzug-lutely! I love him and I love tapping into his indomitable spirit. Even Snowy and Duffy seem perked up. They recognize his voice. They know him for all the hugs and soft mumblings he'd deliver to them while on his knees back in my Oak Park days.



Disaster: Amy Coney Barrett is confirmed as U.S. Justice (10/26/20.

A stick, a stone, / It's the end of the road, /It is night, it is death, / It's a trap, it's a gun. / A cliff, a fall.* It's confirmation day for Amy Coney Barrett. She's got her marching orders. A precipitation deluge of shit to come.

Last night it's chilly in my bedroom due to the snow storm, but I have a roastingly hot and weird dream: An old Latino man is roasting Hatch peppers in a large drum heated by propane. Nearby is a

red truck with its tailgate down. The skin of the peppers bubble and chafe against the hot steel grating of the rotating roaster, their encounter with its vessel is both undeniably close and familiar, yet simultaneously distant and alien. Same for the man, the roaster, and the car. As the chile vendor rotates the drum — a totally private universe for the chiles — a large threatening man in an ICE uniform approaches and handcuffs him, pulls him away from his task. The Immanent Baboon steps into the picture accompanied by New Mexico Republican representative Yvette Harrell and Amy Coney Barrett. They stop the rotating roaster. Then all of them start tearing up the Constitution of the United States, adding it page by page to the roaster's contents, then re-start it again. They walk off, laughing, hand-in-hand, Trump in the center. And the chiles — the official state vegetable here — I understand them as themselves now, finally, knowing that they are entwined with everything that has been about them, mixed into a Big Picture. Skies darken and it starts to snow. Then I awaken. *Qué significa eso, ese*? An Hispano-Zen moment?

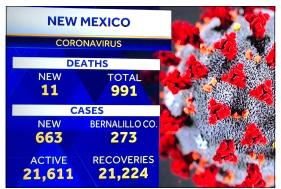


National COVID cases surge.

I stare in front of my mirror for a long time. I think about the struggle of women for equally. Can't imagine how women like Yvette and Amy can support someone like the Baboon. *Is there something that propels women to* . . . I can't finish the thought. Need to get protein in and my glucose levels up. Breakfast. Scrambled eggs with red chiles. Then tune in GMA to see how bad the

coronavirus stats are. Not good. China has had only 4,634 deaths from COVID-19! Yet we are now suffering 73,000 new cases per day! WTF? And we're "turning the corner" on this demon?

^{*} Excerpts from Brazil's Tom Jobim's famous bossa nova song "Waters of March."



New Mexico COVID stats for 10/29/20.



National COVID cases today, 10/29/2020.



"Everything sucks," Gen Z EverTrumpers, Idaho, mock maskwearers. Future Fox News anchors?



Dow dips. Down slips my retirement nest egg.

Snow is fast melting. Sun is out. COVID statistics for New Mexico are way up. Eleven new deaths and 662 new cases as of today. Nearly 86,000 cases nation-wide today, a large jump from yesterday. As the cases go up, the Dow goes down. A downer for my investments. "Fate is cruel and men are wretched," wrote Arthur Schopenhauer, never the optimist. Can I keep a cheerfulness of soul during this awful time? The news at times turns me into a stiff, inert mannikin, my thoughts drifting to agreeing with Voltaire: "We will leave this world as stupid and as wicked as we found it when we arrived." Noonie oft complained — a crystallization of all his scattered feelings from early age onward — "Mediocrity governs us and foolishness prevails"

On GMA, TV anchors take us viewers to various states to report on their response to the increasing numbers of hospitalizations — El Paso and Green Bay, makeshift outdoor hospitals — which are eating up beds as fast as my dogs gobble their treats. Idaho: defiant, snarky, maskless young girls aping the Baboon's meme to just "Get over it." Trump saying re: the virus, "If I can get better, anybody can get better." Trump Jr. saying COVID deaths are "almost nothing." Tripe, tripe, loads of tripe. Trying to appeal to the Hispanic vote, giving them free the ingredients to menudo soup?

Does all this disgust me? Abzuglutely! For many in the younger generation, Trumpism is attractive as a form of rebellion, a way to express their need for independence. Noonie's generation's re-

bellion was distinctly liberal, sexual. Maoism was in; now it's White Power.







Highest recorded COVID cases in a single day 10/30/20.



Breaking news. Deadly terrorist attack in a church in Nice, France kills 3. Cat 2 Hurricane Zeta hits New Orleans (the 5th to do so) killing 6. Belgium suffering COVID XIX's wrath; His Evil Majesty spreading cases throughout Europe. Unemployment rising, 751,000 new claims last week. And the topping on the cake of misery? Cop shot in the Breonna Taylor killing is countersuing! What gall. What tripe!

How much bad news can a girl take? Freund Hein, the Grim Reaper,



Happy Halloween from Austria's Thrash Metal group Freund Hein.

walks the earth. I need distraction. So on Halloween, I will let the imaginary ghouls chase out the real life ghouls, if only for 1 day. I will drive to ABQ to have my oral surgeon examine my extraction. Then explore the famous Old Town Square dating from 1706. Shop for a felt winter hat. Lunch at the famous

Church Street Cafe. Have green chile menudo (tripe) soup with sopapillas and honey. Stroll around the many little shops and gaze up at San Felipe de Neri Church built in 1793. Photograph. Recall that St. Philip Neri has advice appropriate to today's miseries: "A joyful heart is more easily made perfect than a downcast one.... The best way to prepare for death is to spend every day of life as though it were the last." But I'm sure St. Philip wouldn't have thought to associate guns with God.

* * *

27.0



A victim of COVID XIX returning from the grave to haunt Trump and Trump Jr.

Trumpites and their ideology, their practice, is wholly *alien* to me in the meaning of that term being "the inaccessibility of a particular region of experience and sense." I cannot understand such cruelty, indifference, selfishness.

In contradistinction, my experience of Spanish and Native American culture as staged in Old Town Plaza in ABQ. gives me a feeling of being at home. A perfect anodyne to bad news on media.

My long sought for blue hat? I find it today at the Plaza Hat Shop. The proprietor, Kyrena Ketsellbaum — love that name — hails from NYC. Strong accent therefrom. Her father was a lapsed Presbyterian, mother Jewish. She's a strong presence standing behind her counter, a unlit cigarette stuck over her ear. Once was a hippy fiber artist. Has a framed photo of herself

on the wall showing her at 19 in hippy garb smoking pot on Yasgur's farm during Woodstock. There's a sign above that historic photo reading:

OUR JOB IS TO GO WHERE *EVERYONE* HAS GONE BEFORE, BUT WHERE FEW HAVE LINGERED



San Felipe de Neri Catholic Church (1793), Old Town, Albuquerque.

Behind her on a shelf is a small TV/VCR playing (as I find out) misogyny-questioning African American artist Susan Smith-Pinelo's video of her cleavage bouncing up and down to the rhythm of a Michael Jackson song. "You should see my Annie Sprinkle art videos. My female customers love it." We talk art stuff for awhile. I tell her about Noonie's love of video art, his 1st encounter with a 1/4 inch PortaPak, et cetera.

Talk about coincidences! She knows Vitalina. Seems they took a class together, "Yah, if I remember correctly it was a seminar titled, 'Identity Politics Are Back'; this was awhile back." She's a big fan of Vita's vblogs. Says they both love hats. Used hats in her fiber art installations for her BFA show.



Street Scene, Old Town, Albuquerque, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.



Picky's new hat.

She calls hats "food for the head," adding that "if a hat fits perfectly, the head will 'digest' it; it will become part of you." I KNOW WHAT SHE MEANS! I intuited such, but never found the words to describe it. Ky (as she prefers to be called) has — has found the words. Words I want to present here. I want to daven, rock back and forth, singing her praises. I think I've found a sartorial *sensei*.

I tell her what I'm looking for. A winter hat. Blue. I trust she'll find it. She puts a clear plastic sanitary hairnet thingy over my red hair and starts firmly placing a variety of blue hats on me as I face the mirror and she turns around me, scrutinizing, as I comment.

"No. Nope. Ugh. Okay, but. Maybe. I'll think about it. Nice. Too dark. Too light."

Then she goes into her backroom, I hear her rumbling through hat boxes. She finally emerges with the perfect color blue felt hat. OMG!

"That's it. That's it, Ky! Holy shit! I'm totally fleek now."

We seal the deal.

I wear my new hat out; as I pass her, she leans over to directly address my new chapeau: "Enjoy your meal, sweetie!" I'm laughing as I exit Ky's amazing store.

Meal? Yes. Time for Church Street Cafe's famous food. I trip on over across the plaza, nearly tripping on an uneven red brick in the sidewalk as I pass a T-shirt shop sporting hilarious shirts while on my way to imbibe



Mexican tripe soup. I almost stop and buy 1 for my eldest son. It matches his alien sense of humor.

There is no line to get into the restaurant. From the outside it appears to be a small establishment. I enter and have to sign-in on a list of customers so they can contact me if someone turns up to have the virus. Not encouraging. A young Latina grabs a menu and leads me through room after room (it's was oldest house on the Plaza) and finally into a huge elegant dining area. I stop and gaze with wonder, having to catch my breath. Magnificent chandeliers, *trompe l-oeil* windows (upper



Church Street Cafe and Restaurant, Old Town, Albuquerque, NM (panorama, 2020) Picky Hunting.

right in photo above) showing hot-air balloons in ascent. Baskets, rugs, mosaics. A startling menu of visual victuals.

As the hostess walks me to my circular table, my hat still on, a Gen Z girl at a nearby table scans me up and down as if I am a museum piece, then appears to mouth a big unpolite BLERGH! There goes my perfect happiness, it's got a hole in it. I repeat Sam



Beckett's "I can't go on. I'll go on" under my breath and sit myself down among welldistanced tables, careful to put the female twit at my back. Peruse the menu, although I already know what I am ordering — Val vouching for their menudo.

I wish Mark and I had been able to make this trip together. What a romantic setting for a 1st face-to-face date. My last call



to him was yesterday; he told me he was getting stronger by the day, beckoned on by the thought of eventually dining with me. I didn't bring up the possibility that eateries may close all indoor dining with the rapid rise in new cases, that fact that the regular seasonal flu is now linking up with his Evil



Church Street Cafe.

Majesty COVID XIX, asking "My liege, how may I serve you?" to give us a doublepunch in our joust with Freund Hein.

BTW, Call, coincidentally, also recommends the menudo here: "That soup — it's best with green chile sauce, rather than red — *archives* in one bowl all the best of the mendos of times past. "Beck, it's *bonheur d'archive,*" he says, exploiting my love of the French language and my delight in perusing archives, worming his way into my heart. Clever. Just finishing this thought

from my mental archive titled MARKED & NOTED, when my tortilla chips with a side of red dipping sauce arrives. Superb — at 1st munch, perfect blend of tastes, salt and spice, amuses my *bouche*. By the 3rd chip 'n dip, my tongue is laughing. That hole in my happiness is being filled. And my delicious tripe soup will soon dominant the tripe that Gen Zer tossed my way.

Chips are followed by a Paloma cocktail: lime rubbed around the rim of a highball glass and immersed in Maldon Sea Salt Flakes; 2 ounces of Tumbleroot Plata Agave Spirit poured in with a squeeze of fresh grapefruit juice, ice, and a pour of Jarritos grapefruit soda. Oh, yes! And served in an art glass highball glass. New Mexico Nectar.

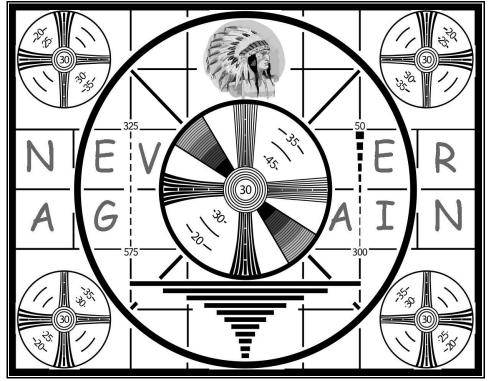
Chips, sauce, cocktail now all combine into a deep pleasure as my eyes scan the beautiful spectacular room about me. (I drop the word *beautiful* since the Baboon is always calling a startlingly large array of things "beautiful" — even sleeping gas. It's his main go-to adjective, and so the word's become perverted, stripped of meaning. What is most noteworthy about Trump's preferred adjective is not simply that he uses it so often, but the ways in which he applies it. Notwithstanding his many, many comments about beautiful women — including his political opponents, members of the media, and First Ladies of foreign countries — he finds beauty in a lot of inanimate objects, some very controversial. He's also found beauty in the body language of at least one gorilla. Like knows like.

Ah, my bowl of menudo is being placed before me. A way-generous portion of tripe and hominy served with a side of raw chopped onions. Do I love onions! The only menudo I've had before was in a red sauce. The green chile sauce makes the dish more delicate on the tongue, the onions and hominy become more prominent on the tongue. With each spoonful, the flavor grows, expands; my taste buds mount the stairway to heaven.

I hear the Gen Z girl and her mother behind me get up from their table. The girl is whining about being denied a dessert, but her mom is firm. They pass me on the right. Just as they're about to leave the room, the girl abruptly turns and gives me a snarky look. There is too much space between the parts of her face — eyes, nose, mouth spread out. As I am now wearing my invisible good-food vest, her arrows of disapproval bounce off me.

I sit satisfied, full, my body registering a 10 on the Foody Scale (the tongue correlates with the Brian brain stem). I'd would usually have a cup of joe at this point, but opt to get a chocolate drink nearby in the Plaza, a Mayan Chile Chocolate Elixir (it's both drink and dessert). It's served at Santa Fe's famous Kakawa Chocolate House. I stop there and get a large cup almost every time I shop at nearby Kaune's grocery.

I pay my bill, tipping generously. Exit the cafe and turn left toward the source of *Xocolatl*, the Mayan food of the gods. On the way, I poke into a small shop selling Indian art, artifacts, books on Native culture. Immediately a print catches my eye. It's a RCA B&W TV test pattern circa 1950 that has been "detourned" by Native American (Cheyenne) artist O. V.A. Bear Shield. Her hack of the offensive-to-many-now test pattern which features an Indian warrior almost in the crosshairs of scoped rifle — all one has to do is imagine bringing your aim up a bit, taking a shot. The artist has added the famous Jewish declaration "Never Again." It makes visible what, with our immersion in Cowboys and Indians movies, us kids back then didn't grok as racist. I find it a brilliant appropriation-of-an-appropriation.



Never Again (Photoshopped photograph, 2019) O. V. A. Bear Shield.

I decide to buy it. There is just 1 cashier and the check-out line is long since the store is having a GOING OUT OF BUSINESS — 50% OFF SALE. I'm waiting in line with:

a young white mother her developmentally-challenged son a middle-aged male India Indian with beard a young Hispanic with tats his Latina girlfriend 2 sisters, I mean nuns a pair of gay men in elegant tourist garb and me, the Old Caboose, bringing up the end.

The 2 men standing in front of me are in a whispered argument:

"No. I *insist* we go to Golden [a now nearly non-existent town where gold was discovered in 1852 located north on the famous Turquoise Trail]."

"No, jeeze Kevin, there is no there there. Worse than Galiesto!"

Shit, Noonie'd told me that "There's no there there anymore, Picky"when he'd returned from a 2015 trip to San Francisco after not being in the city for 25 years. So changed was the city he once loved.

I fiddle away on the iPhone as I wait. Call has sent me a message — "Stay away from crowds"— along with his photo. I don't message him back. Don't want to lie to him about being a crowded line. He looks OK, a little tired. Looks much better than the retired version of David Letterman sporting that Amish-Sasquatch white beard of his. Oh how I *hate* that look. Certainly not *on fleek* in my old fart estimation. Maybe so for white hipsters trying to come off as heap confident.

There's a new Santa Fe Bulletin Board posting, a worrisome one:

Someone Shooting Cars with Paintballs. Between Las Campanas Realty and Wildflower Lane on Camino La Tierra, my wife's Land Rover was shot up with yellow paintballs. Front and driver side windows. If you or your kid have a paintball gun and yellow paintballs and find it funny to shoot folk's vehicles while they are driving, please stop. My wife was too scared to stop. What if she would have lost control and crashed, killing her or my children? I have reported this information to the police.

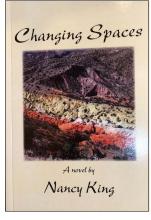
Everyone in line is thumb-picking their iPhones, oblivious to others. Maybe a paintball hit would SMACK awaken them. I wonder if we will finally totally merge with our technology, become cyborgs as envisioned in Andy Warhol's favorite film *The Creation of the Humanoids* (1962). At times, lazing in my chair with iPad, I think I want to get back my old way of life, pre-Web 2.0, at least, if not Web 1.0. Funny thing though. Those humanoids in that sci-fi film so loved by Andy were more sensitive and loving than those real humans who vehemently opposed their creation, the nasty Order of Flesh and Blood. It was seen at



the time as a sly reference to the KKK, but today might better describe the Boogaloo Bois or Proud Boys.

I holster my iPhone and fiddle with Bear Shield's print; looking at it, a Proustian moment of involuntary memory washes over me: Seeing my reflection in a "dead" TV screen mirroring my little me. I think I was about to turn on the "Judy Splinters" show (see page 76), when my reflected self suddenly told me this was how others see me. Was it a mask? A persona? Was it my real inside showing on the outside? I am sure I saw myself in mirrors long before, but this reflected moment is what my jarred memory seems to always reflect upon. Probably because of its association with the TV ventriloquist and dummy I adored. Are we not all a species of ventriloquist-dummy?

My final stop is to a bookstore with a sign



reading: ONLY TWO PERSONS INSIDE AT A TIME — STRICTLY ENFORCED. Nobody is inside. I enter. The ambient music being played in not the usual muzak. Sounds tribal, but not quite. What is it?

"It's A Tribe Called Red, a group of First Nations Djs out of Canada," the owner, a thin bearded Texican stuffed inside a fancy western shirt, tells me. "A blend of instrumental hip hop, reggae, moombahton and dubstep-influenced dance music with elements of First Nations music, particularly vocal chanting and drumming. Quite post-mod."

I tell him to add a CD by the group to my order. I walk

over to the section on New Mexico and Native American books. Aha! I found it. Vita said I should read this: *Changing Spaces* by Nancy King. The blurb on the back reads: *What would you do if you woke up in your usual life, and by the end of the day, everything had changed? When her husband of forty years wants a divorce, shaken-to-her-core Laura Feldman embarks on a bumpy ride from her black & white Midwestern life to the bold colors of New Mexico.* Whoa! Sounds kinda like *my* experience. I grab it. *Thanks Vita!* Next I see *There There* by Native American writer Tommy Orange about Indigenous people living in Oakland, California. Sounds perfect. Grab that too. Gotta do my research. But really it's about keeping my mind focused during the last few days before and after the election.

My stomach suffers GERD, anything that amps up my nervous system can have dire effects on me. Oh, I hate that *pain quotidien*. Yet love my daily bread.



Nope (photo postcard, 2020) Lewis Koch.



The Grim Reaper haunts Aldea (2020) Picky Hunting.

Back home. Get my mail. Notice a postcard from Lewis Koch, Noonie's old bud, Very funny (see photo). Strolling past a distraught Matt (a.k.a., Lambo) decked out in Gucci sweats and Reeboks. He's circling his red Tesla, muttering. "There, there! Shit, oh fuck, someone's 'keyed' my baby!" Weird coincidence. Two days ago I watched a TV episode of "Judge Judy" where the defendant, a white Texan, was accused of keying a white woman's car in a Wal Mart parking that was sporting a Biden sticker.

The dogs mill about my feet. I feed them, then whip up a green chile bison burger with sweet potato fries. Turning on the 5 p.m. KOAT news, there's a disturbing report from Texas: Trumpites in 4×4 American flag-flapping trucks surround Biden's campaign bus. On the other side, a family of Trump supporters in an Albuquerque rally were threatened with a gun.

Reports from other cities of Trump-truckers blocking highways. Fascism versus liberalism spilling into our streets. Scary. FBI investigating the Texas incident. Trump calling those bullying truckers "Patriots." (I suppose Trump sees Russian pilots flying dangerously close to U.S. planes as patriots, too.) Encouraging right-wing thuggery, which sparks, in turn, a reaction. The Baboon thrives on

stirring up such violence, as did Hitler. Divide and conquer.

These intimidating truckers, they're BELIEVERS, they have to believe that believing will work — like the Fundamenalists, which some probably are. Voltaire wrote: "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." Noonie was never much of a believer. He had me in stitches once relating the last time he went to Confession. He walks into St. Hilary's Catholic church (he and his buds dubbed it "Saint Hilarious") and pops into the confessional, kneels and says: "Bless me father, it's been six days since my



last bowel movement." The priest, to his credit, was quick to respond (I fantasize him as a ex-druggy and failed stand-up comedian), "Son, you need a Hail Mary pass." Noonie runs out laughing and never goes to Confession again.

FAMILY THREATENED AT POLITICAL RALLY

Family of Trumpites at a Trump rally threatened at gunpoint in Albuquerque.

ALBUQUERQUE

LDJ408-

My last act before I go to sleep — something Noonie liked to do — is to pick up the Tommy Orange book, *There There*, and open it randomly, yelling THERE, pointing my finger at a patch of text, reading: *Can't stand what the youth have become these days*. *Coddled babies, all of them, with no trace of skin, no toughness left. There's something wrong about all of it. Something about the ever-present phone glow on their faces.*

* *



No argument that our political processes today have been revocably changed by Web 2.0. Fascist ideology now travels at electric speed across the globe, like business transactions now do. Yet our election process has barely entered the digital age. Our elections should be via Internet and be based on 1 person 1 vote — by popular vote — no Electoral College skewing the election results. Moreover, the Senate's departure from this 1 person 1 vote is mind-boggling. Take the filibuster, for instance, 40 senators from states representing 9% of the populace can block a bill; senators from states representing 16% of the people can enact a bill (assuming no filibuster). We need a more direct form of democracy. But will this happen? I'm not

optimistic. But here is a case of pure optimism seen today on Nextdoor Aldea's postings:

Lost Burgundy wallet. I think I lost my wallet in the parking lot of Lowe's here in Santa Fe. It's a leather burgundy wallet and the brand is Aunts & Uncles. Hoping someone found it.

I have to laugh. If the wallet *is* found, surely the monetary contents will have vanished. I could be wrong, but given the financial hardships suffered by people here . . .

Election day. I make a large pot of cinnamon-flavored oatmeal that will last several



A Red State Killer Klown.

days. I've gone to the store and stored up on essentials in case there is street violence tomorrow. On the positive front, it's turning out to be a warm day. So to destress, to flee my vision of the Red State's Killer Klown eating up Biden ballots, I take Duffy and Snowy for a long walk. Not our usual circumnavigation around our community, but 150 degrees southwest, toward Highway 599, to Camino des Vecinos (Neighbors Road). Because of its proximity to this much-used Santa Fe bypass highway, we 3 adventurers are assaulted by the constant lapping sounds of passing trucks and cars, like waves lapping against coastal rocks. I can't imagine anyone wanting to buy a house in this area of Aldea; might as well live in L.A. Noonie often complained about his time in Los Angeles, the constant noise of

automobiles. His family home was parked on a busy street leading to a large grocery market,

so the traffic was constant. When he went into the Air Force, he had to contend with the constant jet engine racket. I'm lucky here. The hill that separates my house from this source of urban noise totally muffles it. I only hear an occasional car directly pass my home. Because of this near constant silence, broken only by the neighbor's dogs, can feel at any time:

1) A Zen calm: where I feel a deep connection to my home and to the New Mexican landscape and all the flora and fauna existing within it. In this state Duffy and Snowy become more like people and I more like an animal.

2) A deep loneliness: missing Noonie; grieving. After Noonie's death, I rented a DVD of Anthony Minghella's film *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1990). The film's topic — Let Them Go — has become even more relevant to my life now. A woman struggles to cope with the death of her lover, only to find that his ghost magically appears and moves back into her flat. When she falls in love with another man, she faces a choice between holding onto the past and facing the future. At the time I saw it, it was the constant feeling of Noonie's presence that hounded me; the aspect of his departure as "gone now" every day thereafter. I was always thinking *Don't leave me*.

Since moving to Santa Fe, the issue about moving on into the future with a new man has become of prime concern and worry. I know I will never find a precise substitute for Noonie (Freud told us that). I'm progressing with my "normal progression grief." I have resilience. That doesn't make it any easier. Grief has a tendency to go wherever it can find an outlet. So talk to myself and to Noonie.

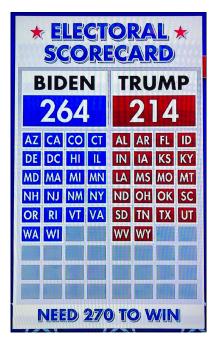


I thought I saw my truant hubby at my oral surgeon's office in Albuquerque.

3) A time to write: my thoughts and memories of Noonie in this journal. I write my grief. Why should grief be a lonely condition; we need to share our pain. I write my attempts at trying to start a new love life. The guilt I feel in moving from Noonie to Mister X. This form of expression is what us psychologists call "affect labeling," and it's been proven via fMRI scan that the "talking/writing cure" does show up as decreases in the activity of the subcortical region of the Brian brain compared to pre-therapy examinations of same.

4) A time to philosophize: my musings lately go toward the Indigenous people here, their dilemma on how to stick to tradition, the past, recover their near-lost languages and cultures, yet become modern, inhabit RL during the digital age. Live on the Res? Live in the city? I recall a Native on the Plaza here

during the troubled protests over that offensive obelisk (see page 307) wearing a T-shirt saying: FIGHTING TERRORISM SINCE 1492.



Interminable counting. Ballot by ballot. Infoglut dancing before my TVed eyes. It's like a horse race that never ends, commentators announcing stats, crowds screaming COUNT EVERY VOTE, Trump on his high horse jockeying for position. My stomach GERD acting up. So tense. I could use some shopping splendorphins right now. Looks like I'm to become a sleep-starved overwatcher. It's going to be a squeaker. The magical number 270. My dogs flank me while I watch the predictions, marvel that so many Americans have been bamboozled by the Baboon so as to still support him. America riven by competing apocalyptic visions: the neo-con mythosphere of a multiracial American versus the liberal fear of climate-change disasters. From what I am seeing on CNN, about 47% of my fellow citizens are creeps! As Carl Sagan observed: "Once you give a charlatan power over you,

you almost never get it back." Yet, I have *espérance* (the English word *hope* doesn't quite convey my feeling accurately). If Biden can tap into his inner FDR as he's starting to do with heartfelt invocations of the New Deal. . . . If the Dems win the Senate. . . .

Phone rings. It's Call calling, beckoning his Beck.

Beck: Widen with Biden!

Call: Who's Trump's pet?

Beck: Melania. Because, horror, she's Slovene to intervene [*this is too much like a pun duel with Noonie*].

Call: Weird to think that the most powerful position on earth might be filled by one of the most mediocre humans to come out of nature/nurture ever — EVER! But there is one thing we *all* feel, Beck [*coughs*].

Beck: What?

Call: Threatened. By different things, of course. But still threatened. Imagine, a whole nation, everyone feeling threatened. But not by Russian bombs as during the Cold War — that brought us together as a nation — but threatened by internal bombs of our own making which cast suspicion between us.

Beck: People who feel threatened are easier to manipulate.

Call: Why Trump encourages COVID XIX to travel his realm, spreading terror, even as he says the threat is to be soon over. That intensifies the threat.

Beck: Yet, if things could *only* get worse, we'd all be dead centuries ago. At least mediocrity in its formlessness is malleable, while the Worst is rock hard.

* * *

28.0

Red Pill

by Hari Kunzru. Knopf, 284 pp., \$27.95

Not long ago, Hari Kunzru was asked in an interview, "What is the worstcase scenario for the future?" He answered with brutal lucidity:

The US becomes an autocracy, and devolves into a weak and fractious patchwork of jurisdictions run by more or less rapacious oligarchs who conduct a losing war with China, first cold then hot. Human rights become a quaint idea. The environment collapses, and the resulting massive migrations of people lead to vicious authoritarian regimes taking control in richer countries. Genocidal wars are fought over water. The Tibetan plateau is a global flashpoint. New pathogens emerge out of the melting permafrost, killing millions. Life becomes hellish for all but the very wealthy. For the masses, the future looks like an insect world of starvation or highly-surveilled shock work; for the few, a melancholy decadence conducted behind high walls. I always thought the shit would go down when I was young and strong. These days I'm just hoping I won't spend my old age picking through the ruins of my city looking for expired canned food.

"Seeing Too Clearly," Jenny Offill, New York Review of Books Nov. 19, 2020, p.33.

Yesterday, Mark and I are exchanging tidbits re: Trump. He asks me to imagine the Baboon responding to errant flunkies with: "How dare you! Don't you know who you are talking to?"

I offer that Trump is "a void made flesh — an Anvoid." That got a good laugh.

"People con themselves," he says, referring to the unmasked that people his rallies. Those who believe their Leader got factories to open in Michigan when he didn't. Those who think Fearless Leader could only lose the election due to fraud.

"Surely," I say, "Trump must've said at some point during the pandemic: "Of what good are the living? They are so many flies, not people!"

Finally, Mark adumbrates an interesting argument contra liberalism. "Hey Beck, Biden's wearing his Blue Hat which reads: LIBERAL RETURN OF THE REPRESSED. It's Biden's brand of economics, foreign policy, and racial politics. Imperialism is the modality through which global capitalism is lived. It has contributed to the situation — "the liberal international order" Biden calls it — we're now in, which has, in turn, made it possible for a demagogue to snake charm so many people who feel economically and politically marginalized." What Mark touts is "alter-globalization," a social

movement whose proponents support global cooperation and interaction, but oppose what they describe as the negative effects of economic globalization, considering it to often work to the detriment of, or not adequately promote, human values such as environmental and climate protection, economic justice, labor protection, protection of Indigenous cultures, peace and civil liberties. He's got my attention. I pause CNN's manic election coverage.

Call calls it absurd to think Biden's election will — POOF! — restore liberal order to our society. "As British poet Michael Rosen wrote: 'Fascism arrives as your friend. It will restore your honor, make you feel proud . . . remind you of how great you once were.' This rising tide of gangsterism has become global," Mark moans. Sees Biden as part of the

"ruling class gerontocracy." He bemoans, "The banging of the same old drum: a right swerve in foreign policy, Biden's personal move to left, yet no real policy shift. Yah, I'll vote for Biden, but we all need to now support a variety of grassroots social programs, push Biden further left. The idea of a good, tolerable society must encompass relations between people at the widest imaginable distance apart. You know, Beck, if factories could be shifted from making cars to making respirators, they could be mobilized against climate change."

"At least he seems more receptive to new ideas," I offer.

He says too many Dems are all about the supremacy of Cold War liberal values that attack authoritarian socialist states, "bad" non-white cultures, "bullshit stuff that has dominated our political thought post-WWII," but which Mark says is "now outdated." Call calls for deficit spending that promotes the public good and not spending that "feeds the appetites of entrenched oligarchy and a warfare state." He argues something to the effect that the history of liberal nations often represses the systemic acquisitive violence, genocide, and racism that haunts them.

"True. True," I tell him.

"Bernie Sanders," he continues, "was edging closer toward rethinking our past form of liberalism, moving toward a new socialist vision. Why the meek Dems, as Bill Maher sees them, were against him. Why youth were so keen on Sanders. Why we still need to organize. Hey, the New Deal was jump-started by activists pushing FDR forward."



"I'm going to win another four years . . . because . . . all forms of media will tank if I'm not there because without me, their ratings are going down the tubes."

Today, November 7th, I muse over Mark's observations as I butter a toasted Thomas brand English muffin to put under my poached egg. Overnight, while I was sneaking a late night snack of Bissinger's Banana Pecan Caramel Chocolate Bar washed down with a shot of red wine as I watched the interminable election reports from Pennsylvania, eager beaver Call scans a bit of text from a book review of Hari Kunzru's novel *Red Pill* in the *New York Review of Books* and e-mails it to me (he doesn't know I subscribe). I include it here because it reads like something Noonie, the weird amateur futurologist, would've written, predicted.

I resist the thought that Noonie's been ghost writing for Hari Kunzru. That thought arising due to my watching a disturbing TV documentary several days ago on the flood of bizarre ghost sightings of the dead (some 16,000 souls) among PTSD suffering survivors of the powerful tsunami that hit the northeast coast of the T hoku region of Japan's Honshu island on March 11, 2011 after a massive 9.0 earthquake. A huge amount of dead. Loved ones snatched from their lives in minutes. But that number pales next to the USA's 235,000 coronavirus victims recorded as of today. Are people seeing ghosts here now? Any postings online about this, I wonder.

BREAKING NEWS



Farewell, Douchebags

Attachment sent by Vita, taken off Bill Maher's TV show.

 Major news organizations are now declaring Joe Biden President. The Immanent Baboon protests the vote. I knew Joe and Kamala would win. So thrilled, like millions of my fellow citizens. Our democracy seems saved. Sanity will return to the White House.

Scads of my friends frantically tweet, post Bravo Zulus ("Well Done!") on their Facebooks, send iPhone messages with wacky attachments. I go to pop prosecco, hoping not to hear about guns popping in our plaza courtesy of the Cowboys for Trump.

Speaking to no one in parti-

cular, breathing like crazy, I'm dancing with abandon in my TV room, nightgown flapping, a bottle of bubbly in hand, thinking: *A Noonie-approved date* — *the lucky numbers 11/7*. I feel my dead husband's presence, his warm arms about me. *He used to say "A hug takes time to develop."* I toast my long-time BAE.

I toast vital Vita, whom I hold in what Rogerian therapists call "unconditional positive regard." For the moment, I don't feel isolated. I bask in the joy of sensing I belong to a *community* of like-minded souls who feel our nation has barely

dodged a fascist bullet. I see 1000s in the streets in other countries as well. A global sigh of relief.





Jpeg Mark sends me.

POLITICO

Official who once called Obama a 'terrorist leader' takes over Pentagon policy

By LARA SELIGMAN and DANIEL LIPPM 11/10/2020 10:34 AM EST



But have we dodged the bullet only to be hit by a bomb?

Mark calls and expresses what I am beginning to sense when Trump refuses to concede: "Beck, we may have to confront something similar to Hitler's political trick, the Reichstag fire, to keep himself in power."

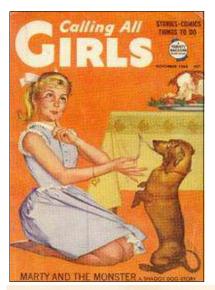
Three days post election. The Immanent Baboon is still playing golf. AWOL from the battle with COVID XIX. What machinations are he and his sycophants thinking up? Defense Department personnel are being fired by Tweet. Malicious Yes Men are being installed. Fat, smug Mike Pompeo hints at Trump's everpresence in the White House. Like he knows something BAD is about to happen to us "liberals", or else just fucking with our minds.

"Beck, are we experiencing a 'slow coup'? A provoked conflict with Iran demanding a 'war president' remain in place?' Provoking chaos in the streets, so federal troops can be beckoned to suppress protest?"

Today, I recall Call's grumbling words; my poor suffering borborygmus Brian brain! Oh, I need some kind of Beano for my bouncing bean. So I put on my CD of Henryk

Górecki's Symphony of Sorrowful Songs (Symphony No. 3, Opus 36) whose dominant elegiac theme is motherhood and loss through war and genocide. Noonie's friend, Lew Koch, used this haunting 1976 composition as ambient sound in a photo installation he did at Wisconsin's Beloit College's art gallery.

Four days post election. Veterans day. Celebrations. A depressed Trump touches a memorial wreath. Partly sunny, cold. The dogs run outside, do their business, and run back in as fast as their little limbs can carry them. I bundle up in my warmest coat and reluctantly march uphill to retrieve my mail. Pass a disgruntled Lambo checking his Tesla's tire pressure. Said he got a LO pressure warning due to the cold.



No bills! But a good surprise: I've been granted a State Farm car insurance COVID refund of \$13.73 (excellent numbers according to Noonie's odd numerology). I'm about to have a sliced roast beef sandwich for lunch when my doorbell rings (Snowy barks ferociously). Fed-Ex delivery — from Mark. I fast hobble back into the kitchen, pull out my trusty box cutters and slice it open. Three surprises: 1) a 60 year-old vintage November 1960 (JFK was elected) copy of *Calling All Girls* magazine depicting a girl and her dog (I told Mark I used to be an avid reader of such); 2) a dozen Picky (energy) Bars; and, 3) a card / love note in which hints of future, post-COVID, white



water rafting adventures, plowing through waves of joy, later paired with craft beer and wine tasting in which a nickel-sized glass portal beckons us into other worlds. An anodyne to the COVID blues that couldn't be better timed. *Oh, Mark!* I mentally sigh.

I grok his wordplay — Calling all girls — a playful reference to

Kamal Harris as an example to all girls, as well as a veiled appeal, a "Calling" to me personally. Despite our physical distance, just the thought of his big beckoning man-hands . . . it starts to untie deep knots hidden within me.

Forgive me, Noonie.

A cheesy western Zen koan by Bertolt Brecht caroms around in my *cabeza*: *What happens to the hole when the cheese is gone?*

* *



New Mexico's COVID statistics for 11/13/20.







Rock formation seen along Highway 503 near Nambé.

Friday the 13th. Startling number of new victims of COVID XIX. Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper dies of COVID. New Mexico's deaths soar. Mark hopes he's immune now, but doctors warn he is still vulnerable due to weakness. If it hadn't been for his joust with His Evil Majesty, he and I would have met for a masked/distanced dinner date by now (MDDD).

Friday the 13th. Should stick to home. Hide from His Evil Majesty. But I need a mental health day — bad. A little trip with Duffy and Snowy is in order. I decide on exploring the landscape around Dixon, an artist colony; then the Picuris Pueblo (a member of the Eight Northern Pueblos; it's native name, *P' wweltha*, means "mountain warrior place" or "mountain pass place"), but it's closed to entry due to COVID. On to Peñasco, where my friend Flo claims I will find "the world's best carrot cake" served at Sugar Nymphs Bistro. "An artsy place, Pick. You'll dig the the place, its decorated walls."

I tell her I've had some super carrot cakes in my life. She defends her review: "*You* think you're picky? When it comes to cake, well dearie I . . ."

I don't argue, "I trust your five-star evaluation, Flo. Yes. I'll get two orders, one for my dessert tonight and another for you. Will leave it on the chair by the front door after five p.m, okay?" I know this gesture of sistership will make pleasant waves in our relationship.

My dog-accompanied drive takes me up through Epañola, toward Taos on U.S. 84/285 and Hwy. 68, but turning off before Taos onto Hwy 75. Returning, I will take the snaking Hwy 503, the scenic High



Old Tree, Hwy 75 near Picuris Pueblo, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.



Trencadis, Sugar Nymphs Bistro property, Peñasco, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.

Road to and from Taos, back through Truchas, Chamisal, and Nambé, back to Hwy 285, past Camel Rock, and home.

A big lazy looping drive, afternoon light highlighting old ranches and brushing stark, expressive dead trees that push up through the soil like boney hands and fingers from a grave. Rolling mountains green with pines, taller snow-covered mountains as a backdrop in the far distance. Quiet valleys with horses grazing, 1 even sleeping on its side. Stunning rock formations harboring millions of years of geologic history exposed by wind and rain. Multifarious structures dot the roadside: old crumbling homes; newer abodes surrounded by weather-beaten shit cars; small, funky eateries offering food-to-go (usually hamburgers); and boarded up, failed businesses, sad victims of COVID XIX. Oddly, I see maybe 6 people during this back country part of my sojourn. The eternal splendor of the landscape contrasts with the entropy suffered by the manmade.

As I promised Flo, I drop anchor at Sugar Nymphs Bistro in Peñasco where decor-wise funky

fun New Mexican meets Hippy San Francisco. The small adjacent lot with outdoor tables is framed by a low adobe wall embedded with colorful broken tile mosaics, bits and pieces, what Flo said were "memoryware and shardware." A Proustian flashback to my trip to Barcelona and the spectacle of Gaudi's *trencadis* at Park Güell. I adore this bistro at 1st sight. While walking the dogs, I notice a "Spread Love" (not virus or fake news!) graffito gracing their parking lot. The artist, his tag simply "K," sets my Brian brain alight with thoughts of Mark. I take it as a Jungian bit of synchronicity, a veiled message from Call, "a



Graffito, Sugar Nymphs Bistro, Peñasco, NM (2020) Picky Hunting.



Grocery price comparison.

cauling" born right there in on the asphalt in front of me. Remember, Call was born *en caul*, as was Freud (see page 257). As I await my giant-size carrot cake orders, I'm enjoying interpreting this spray-can art as a sort of impromptu sacred sand-painting — as if it was a dream. My dream. The spray paint as fluid returns to the solid state (as heart), as my solid state (heart) desires to melt into a fluid state. Calling Mark!

But I'm being called to pick up my delicious cake orders which, when I get home, look like scale models of the iceberg that sank the Titanic.

Speaking of food. KOAT Evening News, responding to the severe new lockdown measures our Governor just today imposed on the state due to the rising coronavirus cases, did a grocery cost comparison of identical online orders from Amazon Whole Foods versus Wal Mart Plus. The resulting figures didn't surprise me. Bars, gyms, massage and tattoo parlors, nail and hair salons, both indoor

and outdoor dining, all must cease for 2 weeks. Our Aldea H.O.A. is re-enforcing mandatory mask wearing at all times outside our homes. Val called me in tears to cancel my next hair cutting, unless she comes to the house and performs her skill in my front entrance. These restrictions mean an extinction level event for many businesses. But what choice do we have as we play chess with His Evil Majesty COVID XIX? Yes, all this happens on Friday the 13th. I'm too depressed to even call Call, tell him about my trip.

Duffy and Snowy seem to sense something of my dejection. They hop up next to their couch-potato owner and snuggle their soft, warm bodies close. I am grateful I have these animals' unconditional affection.

* *



"There's no right light in falsehood" (Theodor Adorno).



"The world is everything that is the case," wrote Ludwig Wittgenstein. And overnight, the case is that a deluded Ever-Trumper mob clashes with Biden supporters near the Capitol. Red-cappers firmly believing Communism is coming, the election rigged, the virus a hoax. Not wearing masks in a "Live and Let Die" form of mass psychosis. Trump, a dictator wanna be, passing through the adulating crowd waving bobbleheadlike from his thick-windowed car. Saints and Sinners.

BTW, Mark sent me a sad Saints and Sinners snippet

from our local newspaper concerning the passing of the saintly owner of Española's famous Saints and Sinners Bar, Dennis Salazar, from COVID. He started the 1st cable company in the area, and more. The newspaper tribute included this mourning relative's comment:

"Uncle Dennis had such a distinct energy. Community builder, educator, ability to engage you in a deep conversation at the drop of a hat. This man survived cancer, armed robbers, and even a truck that crashed into a bar one year. He will be greatly missed as he had such a positive impact on the community [and] anyone that had the opportunity to cross paths with him."



Amidst such a message of death, Mark's daringly dangles a sort of red carrot before me in his message: "Beck, you can order scads of Saints and Sinners memorabilia from their website, including *this* cute, sexy women's booty shorts." I get the hint. I feel a slight warming of

my forehead. "Doubt can only exist where there is a question; a question where there is an answer,

and this only where something *can be said*," wrote Wittgenstein. Ergo, I must say: I'm not sure the item would come in a size generous enough to reach the across the gentle rising slopes of flesh all the way to the hinterlands of my hips. But it would be cheeky to do so. *Thanks, Call . . . for the beckoning thought, though.*

I check the NextDoor Aldea postings and find a reference to the high winds we've been suffering the past 2 days:

Lost sand box cover. Our sandbox cover blew away with the big winds, perhaps into your yard. It's dark green on one side with a silver under side and hexagonal shape. Thanks for reaching out if you have it!

I want my reader to know that I am working like the wind out here with the enthusiasm of *forwards* and *through*! Attacking the seemingly bottomless abyss of a pandemic and the harsh politics endemic to our social climate through creative output. In my adopted State of New Mexico, the uncanny and primal powers of nature are more exposed, and thus more felt. I live more intensely in my modest-sized adobe-walled home (think of Martin Heidegger writing away in his Black Forest *Hütte*). That strong wind, blowing through the abyss of RL NOW includes maskless armed crazies in the streets and sandbox covers sailing through the air. Yet I am armed with my *casa*, *cabeza*, *y amigos* — even a potential lover (how about that?). Forwards and through.

I'm still trying to get the State of New Mexico to grandfather me into a license to practice psychoanalysis here. But if not, then, as both Mark and Valentina have suggested, might I become a lifestyle consultant (Mark) or a feng shui advisor (Val). Either would play well here in New Age Santa Fe. I'd have *clients* again. Oh, how I love to say that word *cclllieentsss*. It rolls so well off my tongue, down the water-slide. Better than *patients*, right? Too plosive. *PAH-shints*. Shit.



helluva motivator.

To perform these new professions, one has to look *right*. Adopt the correct signifiers. To look legit for a feng shui expert, I need a pair of obsidian wealth bracelets. For a lifecoach, a pair of Trust Your Journey earrings. And I like jewelry. *Jew*elry, a

I am always more than I can know of myself, but a thing I do know, as you've noticed over the several hundred pages of this book, I'm a *word-sensitive*. Interested in the difference and play between "meaning" and "sense." So was Noonie. And he loved bread. We have the concept of an entity, in English *bread*, that in German is called *brot*, and in French *pain*. These words have the same sense, but their *way* of meaning is different.

These "bread" words were not interchangeable for Noonie. *Brot* always meant for my late hubby the culinary event when our Austrian waiter *brought* the immense bread cart to our table while dining at Vienna's famous Steirereck Restaurant. But dining at Le Grand Véfour in Paris, *pain* was more appropriate as it also described being served by a nasty *garçon* who served us our bread as if he suffered a collapsed spinal disc. When at home in

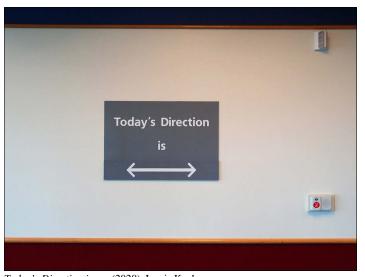
Oak Park, as per Noonie, *bread* was the more appropriate term as he often *read* at breakfast, quickly munching his buttered toast, turning book pages — called his breakfast time, my *breadfast*.

* *

BREAKING NEWS

I turn on GMA this a.m. to see what direction the post-election events are taking. Bad news. Reports that our Immanent Baboon asked senior advisers last Thursday about potential options for attacking Iran's main nuclear site. The advisers warned His Pants that military action could spark a broader conflict (no shit!), officials were cited as saying. The White House has not commented on the accounts of the meeting. It took place a day after the global nuclear watch-dog said Iran's enriched uranium stockpile was 12 times what was permitted under a 2015 nuclear deal. Wittgenstein, in his *Tractus logico-philosophicus*, wrote: "That the sun will rise tomorrow, is an hypothesis, and that means that we do not know whether it will rise." Waking up, sensing how close we might have been to being obliterated by an Iranian nuke overnight, that Austrian philosopher's statement hit home hard. The Baboon is trying to stir up trouble, invoke a wartime emergency to grab power.

As if I am not upset enough by this bit of awful news, GMA runs a feature concerning the new, hot social media app Parler. A "free speech app" that will *not* censor false news and conspiracy theory memes, as Facebook and Twitter do. A dream media of the Far Right financially backed by millionaires to further divide the country. In the 1950s, if a social media entity were to broadcast Far Left propaganda, it would've been shut down in



a minute, but if it's rightist crap, it is allowed to flourish. *Fascism always wins*.

As if reading my troubled mind, Noonie's photo friend in Wisconsin just sent a jpeg that visually speaks to this issue of where our divided Country is headed.

Stock report: the stock market is up. Good? Not exactly. How can the market rebound when the economy has not? CNBC's Jim Cramer's answer:

Today's Direction is . . . (2020) Lewis Koch.

"Because the market doesn't represent the economy; it represents the future of big

business." He points out that while small businesses are dropping like flies, big business — along, of course, with bigger wealth — is coming through the crisis virtually unscathed.

Noonie was onto all this shit, as it applied to his experiences at his school; just before his death he made this notebook entry, which Yersinia Pestis somehow got hold of and cited in her book (I'm beginning to think my hubby was feeding her more data than I knew about — will ask my PI bud, Dallas, to check that out):

The silence of the Left on Wall Street "wealth transfers" is hardly an accident. American Left and Progressive institutions are supported financially by Wall Street and global financiers. This funding means that, in practice, the American Left operates as a controlled opposition. It maintains its relevance by sustaining social and racial tensions (as seen operating within identity politics) that draw attention away from Wall Street and its crimes. The more basic issue of class is given less emphasis. This neoliberal ideology operates within our school's administration.

I snap the TV off. Grab a Café Verona K-cup, make hot brew, add a small amount of vanilla syrup — noticing an under-cabinet fluorescent bulb is kaput — and slide softslipper to my office computer — I love the scrapping sound of slippers on brick in the morning — dogs flanking me. Once online I — oh, shit! — I have a message from another man posting on OurTime.com:



SCARBOROUGH FAIRE: parsely, sage, rosemary, and not much time left. Retired judge (76) living with my brilliant autistic elder son and a beautifully annoying dog. The boy, the dog, cocktails, sachertorte, moral philosophy, and love of the outdoors are really important. Everything else is negotiable in court. A real plus if you like to binge watch the TV reality show "Judge Judy"!

I'm beginning to regret adding to my profile page this fascination of

mine with "Judge Judy." I *do* like Hiz Honor's use of nostalgic sepia-toning in his profile pic. I don't regret having changed my profile photo (after starting to communicate with Mark) to a fragmented heart-shaped design found on a dog walk awhile back.

Yes. I am still "searching" even as I focus on Mark. It's not a "Calling All Boys," kind of thing, but just being buoyed up by men responding *to me*. Eager ego thing. It is nice to have men still *look* at me. Find me interesting. I find Mark *very* interesting. He and my friend Mary have in common an admiration for Thomas Merton.



Picky's new profile photo.

* * *

29.0





New Mexico COVID stats for 11/18/20.

Top stories: 250,000 COVID deaths. Trump fires Chris Krebs, Director of Homeland Security who rejected the Immanent Baboon's election conspiracy theories. Record day for new coronavirus cases in NM. Depressing.

Record warm weather. Perfect day to escape.

Lexstacy and I take a trip northwest to Los Alamos, then southwest along scenic route Hwy 4 to Valles Caldera (a collapsed volcano valley with hot springs and fumaroles), further south to the sleepy town of Jemez Springs, finally to Jemez Pueblo (closed).



Near Los Alamos, NM (Hwy 502) (2020) Picky Hunting.

Fossil hunters strip away layer after layer — uncover, reveal — as did they at Ghost Ranch in the late-1940s. Archaeology produces a surfeit of "overnaming" things. I, myself, prefer to see layers laid upon themselves; a lusty sandwich of geologic time, of Indigenous,



Valles Caldera (Hwy 4) (2020) Picky Hunting.



Jemez Pueblo, Rocks, NM (Hwy 4) (2020) Picky Hunting.

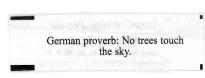
Spanish, Crypto-Jewish and Anglo cultures, all enriching the fantastic experience of this extraordinary land and its diverse peoples. Innumerable stages brought to life, speaking simultaneously as I travel about. And do I love sandwiches. Pastrami. Pulled pork. Corned beef. Club sandwich. Croque monsieur. BLT. Cheesesteak. Barros luco. Doner kebab. Bauru. Breakfast roll. But the magnificent New Mexican cultural sandwich can be chewed on for decades. Chewed on until my last gasp of breath. But I'd like to chew on that sandwich with Mark, share it, until that last breath.

Did you see what you just wrote, Picky?

On my way back home, I stop off at Lu Lu's Chinese and pick up an order of their famous shrimp egg foo young and enough shumai so the dogs can partake in our the dinner feast, too. I can hardly wait to see what my fortune cookie will say.

I drive by and retrieve my mail. Notice Lambo's violated car finish has been repainted. Wave to Moss (*sans* mask) who is walking his dog. I dump a stack of mail order catalogues that always plague my mailbox (how the hell they got my new address is beyond me) and find 2 bills, 2 postcard-sized photos by Milwaukee-based artist Robert Clarke-Davis (a former colleague of Noonie's and friend of Lewis Koch) of Trump signs he's found in rural Wisconsin, and a plea for donations to our local food bank. Hard times.

I set out my Chinese fare, open a bottle of Anitori's Tenuta Guado al Tasso



Vermentino Bolgheri 2019, a white wine I bought at
Kaune's, and let it and the sweet sauce of the egg foo young dance on my palate. After which, I open my fortune cookie and get a German proverb that, for me, simply means: As a human being with a limited life span

all I can do is enjoy my journey on this earth.



When I sit down to watch David Muir's news segment on ABC, what appears onscreen is the terrible visage of sweating Trump sycophant Rudy Giuliani, hair dye dripping down his disgusting skin, damning the election results with his wacky conspiracy theories. Too bad his sweat and all the tears of all



Americans could not be collected and sent to New Mexico, where quite severe drought conditions prevail.

I was joking with Mary the other day: "M., this may sound silly, I don't recall what rain looks like, its sound."

"Picky, just watch

Brit TV — like the series "The Crown" — all those raincoat-clad people with umbrellas running down the street, dashing from taxis to buildings, shaking out their bumbershoots, grumbling about the weather," she replies. "Or fly to our southern coastal areas."



Stephen "Fox News" Fox owner of New Millennium Gallery busted.



Rand Paul's rant re: Acquired immunity versus vaccines.

She's right. GMA has provided a "spaghetti" map of the unprecedented 30 tropical storms to hit the USA this awful year. It's like a monster has had 30 terrible offspring, some with weird names, and let loose to wreak havoc with the toys of Western civilization. If this isn't proof of climate, change what is?

Mary is vehemently convinced "these coastal areas will eventually have to be abandoned," she tells me in a phone call during which she also comments on Santa Fe's New Millennium Gallery 77-year old owner Stephen Fox's arrest for his participation in the vandalism of the controversial obelisk in the Santa Fe Plaza (see page 308). Evidently, new video shows the cantankerous old gent participating in the destruction of public property.

I tell Mary, the guy believes in the COVID conspiracy theory pushed by Trumpites and never wears a mask either outside or inside his gallery. "He once got snotty with me when I busted him about his lack of public safety consciousness," I tell her.

I am reminded about this incident with Fox (I've dubbed him "Fox News" as most of his opinions are for shit) as the evening news features crazy Paul Rand ranting about stats (falsely interpreted) that show *doing nothing*, letting the coronavirus spread and generate immunity, was more effective than getting vaccines out to the public! *How many fingers am I holding up*? Orwell flashes through my overtaxed Brian brain.

Mary asks about Mark, adding, "You know, Picky, anyone who really wants to be struck by Cupid's arrow cannot have fired it themselves. It takes two to tango."

"Oh, we are exchanging *faux* dirty love letters," I say, "believing that what *words* we find erotic reveal our deeper selves, desires." This bit of blushing reveal by *moi* gets me to segue into an excursus on Noonie's wacky play with sense and meaning (see page 352) of words. I tell her that my dearly departed preferred to call dinner "*Abendbrot*" (German for supper, literally "evening bread") and called an unsavory evening meal (when dining out) "Abysmal *Abendmahl*," using that home-cooked hybrid term in his negative Yelp reviews."

"Playing on the similarity of pronunciation of the 2 words, right?

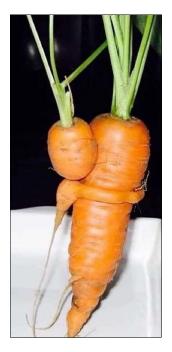
"Yep."

"Weird, Picky."

"Mary, I guess you can grok why Noonie's a hard act to follow. Why Mark senses the challenge before him."



Rabbit and carrot, Picky's backyard.



"He's trying to find the right carrot to dangle before you, I bet."

"Funny you mention that. He sug-gests we jointly author a 'relationship diary,' a sort of private blog, *The Daily Carrot*. Got the name after I tell him of my habit of setting out a big carrot for a rabbit that skulks about my backyard. He says, 'It should be akin to two reporters reporting on and exchanging opinions of their daily experiences.' A way of dialoguing in a more considered, permanent way than just chatting on FaceTime."

"Honey, I love the idea!"

"Me, too. So we've started it. That erotic love letter thing was our trial run."

"Wherein he dangles *his* carrot, huh?" She laughs.

"Now, Mary . . ."

"Hey, check out the jpeg I just sent you. Two carrots in an embrace!"

"Wow! Synchronicity!"

"Add *that* to the fact Mark also reads Thomas Merton."

"Noonie was a fan of Merton, too.

BUZZZZZZZZ BZZZZZZZZ.

My iPhone. I have another caller beckoning. Maybe it's Call. I hasten to sign-off with Mary only to find Lew Koch on the line, Noonie's old BFF. Wants to see how I am holding out. I want to know how he is holding out, too. Tough times.



Lewis Koch.

Blah, blah, blah. We exchange our lockdown lows. Then he notes that we are fast getting on to the year 2025, exactly 100 years after the fateful year of 1925. "Picky, let me list some key explosive events from of that year. Tell me if they don't resonant with the growing disturbance of our own times, what they may forebode."

It is a long, disturbing conversation. I will just paraphrase his telling list of noteworthy 1925 events, events he sees paralleling our troubling present and near future:

- 1) Creation of the political Hitler cult.
- 2) Mass stupidity fostered by the mass media.
- 3) Hitler's Mein Kampf is published.
- 4) Stalin [Putin] assumes power.
- 5) Franco invades Morocco with the battle cry "Long live death!"
- 6) Conservative Paul von Hindenburg replaces the Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert as President of the Reich.
- 7) Kafka's The Trial is published.



Radio priest Father Charles Coughlin.

He goes on to mention the foreshadowing of modern talk radio and televangelism by Father Charles Coughlin's 1930s radio broadcasts that reached tens of millions listeners, religious services with political overtones and anti-semitic views, pro-Nazi opinions.* I bring up the British politician Oswald Mosely's British Union of Fascists (I'd just seen a Netflix documentary on the Mitford sisters, 1 of whom married Mosely).

We both simultaneously groan: IT'S BAAACK! We both know that despite the election, our country has a long way to go before rifts are healed. The situation may grow even worse — as it did in Europe after 1925.

* *

* Father Charles Coughlin's views as a priest were influenced by late-eighteenth century Catholic teachings emphasizing conservative clerical activism. His views were also shaped by the Basilian Order to which he belonged. Founded in France in the early nineteenth century, the Basilians studied medieval church doctrine in the context of fierce opposition to modern economic and social developments. They believed that the Church should return to its theological roots. Among other issues, they called for the Church to restore the prohibition against usury. Many Basilians regarded the practice of usury as a main source of the ills that afflicted modern society, hence the anti-semitism.

THE DAILY CARROT

November 22, 2020 Volume 1, Number 2 Today's Issue in Memory of JFK Beck & Call, Editors

C: Where were you when JFK was assassinated?

B: At the University of Chicago. A freshman. Eating a carrot in my dorm, someone announced the tragedy.

C: I was in my algebra class in highschool.

B: My father was convinced a John Bircher did it.

C: People forget there were many right-wing nutters out there back then.

B: Senator Barry "Nuke Hanoi" Goldwater.

C: Bill Buckley, Jr.

B: Something new has happened to me.

C: What?

B: Well . . . a big You in the middle of my Self, my Being. I feel like I should be communicating with you via a flashing light at a window or a chalk symbol on a park bench in the Santa Fe Plaza.

C: I guess our 'situation' demands a choice.

B: Better. A decision. Choice seeks justification in predictable consequences, while a decision does not. Choice is always conditional. A decision is unconditional, and hence fact free. Choice remains entangled in myth; decision breaks away from the rational logic of cause and effect. Decision is an existential leap. Our decision to jump into a new life – or not – together.

C: Okay, decision. I like the sound of that word better than choice anyway. I do. A difference is the 'c' sound versus the 'd' sound: DEE'-ciggshun.

B: Yes! A decision about life in space and time lies outside space and time. Kinda.

C: Let's decide to keep publishing *The Daily Carrot*! - 30 -



STATEMENT FROM FORMER TRUMP HOMELAND SECURITY OFFICIALS

"The President has wrongfully called into question the integrity and security of the 2020 U.S. election and is now inappropriately abusing his office to undermine the democratic process, attempting to disenfranchise voters, and delaying the transition"





Treeways (2020) Picky Hunting.

His Evil Majest COVID XIX executes 1 American every minute now. Some 84,000 cases today. The Baboon plays golf. America has rejected him. He rejects America. Refuses to cooperate with the coronavirus transition team. Operation Warp Speed meets Operation Warped Mind. People dying. Wish His Pants could be charged with criminal negligence when he leaves office.

Some hope. Several vaccines show promise and are nearing distribution. Some more hope. Mark and I have found mutual excitement in collaborating — we call it "munching"— on *The Daily Carrot*.

Moreover, he is very supportive of my photography efforts — I've come to call menschening. Of my recent image, Treeways, mentions how "You got soft eyes, gal, you can see the whole thing revealed in a detail. Complex branching within a tree with its larger branchings, a symbol of our larger complexly interconnected techno-society. Hey, that image would be a good one to focus on when meditating. Grab your *zabuton* and *zafu* and do your *zazen*. Ya zee what I'm talkin' 'bout, Beck? Bet two hours starin' at that flick would feather your props, kiddo [i.e., calm me down]."

Mark's interpretation is an instance of what 1950s photographers Minor White and Henry Holmes Smith termed "reading a photograph" (thanks Noonie). Such readings are akin to dream interpretations, Jungian and Freudian. The image is polysemic.

Minor White (see page 274). Part photographer, part mystic. Heavily influenced by Zen and Taoism. In the 1950s. Way before Robert Pirsig's effort to put "the garden back into the machine" in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), which went viral, infecting all aspects of society (see list below). It's publication coincided with a pivotal moment in a worldwide transition to more network-saturated and informational modes of capitalism.

Zen and the Art of Calm Maintenance Zen and the Art of Canine Maintenance Zen and the Art of Car Decor Zen and the Art of Car Design Zen and the Art of Car Rental Zen and the Art of Car Thievery Zen and the Art of Carpet Beating Zen and the Art of Casting Zen and the Art of Castle Maintenance Zen and the Art of CD Collection Maintenance Zen and the Art of Ceding Control of Consumer Tech to End Users Zen and the Art of Central Heating Maintenance Zen and the Art of CEO Driving Zen and the Art of Checkbook Balancing Zen and the Art of Child Maintenance Zen and the Art of Classified Advertising Zen and the Art of Clay & Glass Zen and the Art of Clubbing Zen and the Art of Coaching Zen and the Art of Cocktails Zen and the Art of Coffee Roasting Zen and the Art of Color Zen and the Art of Combining Motorcycling with Fatherhood Zen and the Art of Communication Zen and the Art of Competitive Eating Zen and the Art of Condé Nast Zen and the Art of Connecticut Brews Zen and the Art of Contemporary Urban Design Zen and the Art of Cooking Zen and the Art of Cooking up Italian Mysteries Zen and the Art of Coping with Alzheimer's Zen and the Art of Corncrake Surveillance Zen and the Art of Corporate Productivity Zen and the Art of Cramming Zen and the Art of Creating a Taste of the Orient Zen and the Art of Crime Zen and the Art of Culture Zen and the Art of Curry Zen and the Art of Cutting Grass

Certainly there must be people scribbling away today in their home offices on such titles as: Zen and the Art COVID Defense, Zen and the Art of the Deal, Zen and the Art of Washing Hands, maybe even on Zen and the Art of Feathering your Props.

Yes, Mark knows how to stop me emotionally "hotdogging" over minor frustrations I tend to blow out of proportion. A tendency that annoyed Noonie no end.



President Elect Biden chooses his cabinet.



Beth Harmon's Queen's Gambit, in which a sacrifice of the queen's bishop's pawn is offered.



Roy Lopez opening (Noonie's preferred opening).

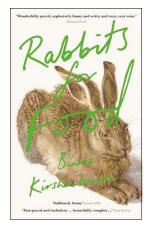
Biden appears to be following the dictates of *Zen and the Art of Cabinet Choices*. His picks for key posts are excellent. I thought I was picky! He has selected a diverse group which bolsters my confidence in the direction our Country will be taking post-Baboon.

However, Biden has failed to denounce with sufficient force the Trump nightmare we've been living, the true meaning of its dire threat to democracy, its long history in the American experience. So less "American dream" rhetoric, more "wake the fuck up to the fascist threat" is needed in Biden's Gambit.

The image above grouping Biden with his selections reminds me of pieces on a chess board, ready for action. Speaking of chess boards. Mark has insisted I watch the new Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit*. Now Noonie tried to get me to learn chess so we had a game other than Scrabble to play. No go. Checkers is all I can manage. He didn't like checkers. Brought to mind Tricky Dick Nixon's "Checker's Speech."

Noonie imagined chess as an Art World agon: King (museum director), Queen (major collectors), Rooks (curators), Knights (dealers), Bishops (critics), Pawns (artists) with all the

social, financial, and political motions at work on the board. "Picky, notice that no one playing chess seems to be having *fun*, like people playing other games?" I recall that because Beth Harmon and her opponents in *The Queen's Gambit* are *serious*, dire. Probably why I didn't want to play chess with Noonie, because it was misnamed — one doesn't *play* chess.



The adopting mother in *The Queen's Gambit* is a selfmedicating depressive. A roll of the comic dice occurs because the day I start to watch this 7-episode series, my friend Melanie sends me a Thanksgiving Day gift: Binnie Kirschenbaum's (what a name!) novel about another depressive woman, *Rabbits for Food*. The title inverts my daily-carrots-for-food-for-rabbits thing I've got going. But do I really need another depressive haunting my imagination right now? Binnie's book begins: "The dog is late and I'm wearing pajamas the same material as Handi Wipes, which is reason enough for me to wish I were dead." Well, that wish *is granted* to our chess whiz's adoptive mom in *The Queen's Gambit* (pardon the spoiler). No. I think I will pace my literary engage-

ments with depressives, 1 *after* another, not simultaneously. So Kirchsenbaum will have to wait. And Beck and Call have our 6th issue of *The Daily Carrot* to get out.

* *

THE DAILY CARROT

November 26, 2020 Volume 1, Number 6 Thanksgiving Day Issue Beck & Call, Editors

"One of the reasons there can not be a postmortem on Trumpism is that Trumpism *is* postmortem" ("Democracy's Afterlife," Fintan O'Toole, *New York Review of Books*, December 3, 2020).

C: I like Fintan's insight on Trumpism now.

B: So the Baboon has always already been an afterlife?

C: Yah, from my psychoanalytic perspective, its appeal has always been 'necromantic'. It promised to make a dead industry, coal, rise again.

B: I see. And he rose again after three days in the hospital when His Majesty COVID XIX was visiting him.

C: Powerful image. His Pants even said post-recovery, "I feel so powerful."

B: Such that the Baboon and his Zoo see the majority of anti-Trump voters as an illegitimate group outside the real polity, as anti-American and morally corrupt, who steal elections. So anti-democratic ploys like gerrymandering, voter suppression, the domination of the Senate, and the use of the Supreme Court become patriotic imperatives. After Biden's ascendency to the White House "there will be no chastening, just a further injection of resentment and conspiracy-mongering" (Fintan O'Toole).

C: I agree. Zombie politics. The dominant power in the land? The undead Republican Party. Biden will have a long way to go to dismantle the Zoo the Baboon has constructed and still promotes as he refuses to climb into his political grave. I am glad we are on the same page about this post-election sour grapes.

B: I like sour cranberries. This Thanksgiving, we do have much to be grateful for.

C: For sure. Despite the thirty-five per cent rise in COVID cases this week, 1 American dying every minute. Despite the rise in unemployment to some twenty million; the large number of people going hungry now, parents declining meals to feed their children; despite the Supreme Court ruling contra New York's lockdown on Church gatherings, guaranteeing more deaths ahead; despite Trump telling people to gather for the holiday in violation of science, encouraging people to play Russian roulette – he knows this is a society replete with interruptions, incoherence, a populace demanding surprise, brusque variation, and endless excitements.

B: We no longer know how to be inspired by boredom, the delights of the monk's cell. We fear the solitary. Fear thinking too deeply. *Distraction* becomes existentially and politically necessary: sports, crap music videos, awards shows, "Dancing with the Stars," Realty TV (yes, some of this I like, sorry to say). Noonie *loved* his solitary moments. The lockdown wouldn't have affected him negatively. He'd knock out a novel, amusing himself watching stupid people put their lives at risk.

B: I know, I know. There certainly is enough to be depressed about, but we have discovered each other. You recovered. I'm not ill. My dogs continue to be my wonderful furry companions. We live in a Blue State. Today's weather couldn't be more perfect. Let us dwell upon Paul Valéry's lines in his poem *Palm*: *Eternal hope is climbing / Through solemn lines of sap / To reach maturity*. Mysterious YOU, mysterious ME, we are still alive. So let me offer my holiday card to you, to all my friends (via e-mail and on Facebook):



C: Thanks. Yes, despite what I said, we do have much to grateful for this day. It's just that sometimes the ills of our times starts to overwhelm me.

B: Me too.

C: I am picking up a Turkey Day dinner from La Casa Cena. A bit expensive, but trouble free. And you?

B: I ordered a whole DIY turkey dinner from Blue Apron, a complete ingredient-and-recipe meal kit. Just add the chef, *moi*, and *voilà*! No shopping, no risking meeting COVID XIX in the checkout line, no fuss. Are we still on for the 5 p.m. zoom-date with me and my family?

C: Sons in Minneapolis and Washington, D.C., right? Wouldn't miss it.

B: Yes. They're being hit by bad weather though. That storm that tore into the South ripping off roofs has nudged northeast. Fierce winds. And Southern California, Noonie's old haunts, also has high winds today with the accompanying fire danger EXTREME.

Let's not put this issue to bed until l've added photos of my Thanksgiving feast today, okay?

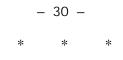
C: Excellent. Your dangled carrot accepted.



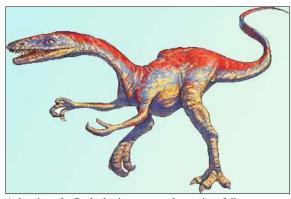
Blue Apron, complete ingredients for a perfect Turkey dinner.



Turkey dinner with collards, carrots, potatoes, stuffing, corn bread with gravy and cranberries.



30.0



A drawing of a Coelophysis, a very early species of dinosaur.

"We think of ourselves as supremely successful beings, the rulers of the earth, but there is every reason to think that we, too, will become extinct (perhaps sooner than later) as did those rulers of the earth," so writes Edwin H. Colbert in *The Little Dinosaurs of Ghost Ranch* (1995). Colbert, an archaeologist, is discussing dinosaurs and extinction-level events, pondering why the dinosaurs once roaming the en-

virons of New Mexico's famed Ghost Ranch terrain disappeared so quickly (see page 317). He wonders if a pandemic caused the sudden deaths of so many Coelophysis, resulting in the dense fossil deposits unearthed there.

"Oh *alert alert* to fire and wind and plague, which leaps out of myth" ("The Sirens," a poem by Marianne Boruch). Colbert — besides, of course, the Shoah — reminds me how precarious *our* existence as humans on this planet is, what with climate change and now the coronavirus pandemic (around 61,600,000 deaths world-wide as of today). Way too many ways to *not be here* these days. For my distant relatives in Russia, it was pogroms. Today suicides are up; then there is the question of Noonie's demise (murder?); a car running over you during a political street protest; an exchange of gun fire between pro- and anti-Trump protestors; a cop shooting you as you reach for your wallet; or being a passenger on the 1st 737 airplane put back in service, that crashes on take-off; an EverTrumper with an ax to grind, on your head; trampled to death by mounted Cowboys for Trump.

During a post-election kerfuffle on the streets of Santa Fe, I witness a young black man yelling, repeating, "Let me drop some truth into your tangent, muthafucka!" to a small Cowboys for Trump dude on a very large horse who was calling the election result "A Fuckin' Fraud!" A moment before, this diminutive "Cowboy X" rode in to the parade line of horses to much applause by his compadres: "Here he is now! Here is our best boy! He rides hard and stays thirsty. He's the *man*! He's the *man*, Little Big Shorn is!" The situation was amping up to a brawl, so I got the fuck out of there, fast. Like Custer should've at The Little Big Horn.

Arriving back home, still shaking from my raw street experience, I immediately Google this cowboy's moniker, "Little Big Shorn," and sure enough, he's on Instagram, several conspiracy and survivalist sites. Posing *sans* horse and cowboy hat, the photo reveals him as short, with shaven head, a bit chubby, eyes riveted at you from inside the virtual screen reality. Scary — these Nazi's on horseback who think they own the Plains (see page 210). Although New Mexico is Blue, there are plenty of Red Hats here.

But also many sacred spaces in this Land inhabited by steadfast Indigenous people who testify to the constant agon against extinction. Brian D. Vallo, Governor, Pueblo of Acoma, begins an article on such: "My connection to sacred places like *Wáphra'ba'shúka* (Chaco Canyon), begins before birth, through many generations of ancestors whose prayers established the foundation for this distinct affinity. The bloodline of those who settled and engaged with the vast hollowed landscape is the same blood that runs through my own being as an Acoma man, in this present time. The migration of my bloodline from the time of creation and emergence provides me and other descendants of Chaco with a context for identity and understanding of contemporary Pueblo culture. Further the connection extends to the sky, above, the oceans, and the depths of our Earth Mother" ("A Sacred Space," *El Palacio*, Winter 2020). Reading this — on a morning graced by a dusting of light snow, while sipping coffee in my kitchen — makes me feel less anxious, more hopeful, and I grok deeply this connection to place and identity given voice by Vallo.



Kitchen window view (11/28/2020) Picky Hunting.

Watching the snow melt as the sun comes out. Sensing my heart melt as Mark's sun shines on it. I am eager to absorb Mark's perspective into the center of myself, nudging Noonie off-center. Collaborating on *The Daily Carrot* has worked its magic. Working out each issue, debating what our material will be, arriving at a *middle* between us, not the

middle of nowhere, but of somewhere. Our own path. We seek a balance, something we actively nurture. In fact, I wanted to title our project *The Middle* after a TV series I was addicted to. But Mark convinced me of the cuteness of the carrot concept.

I'm reading Proust in my living room and wolfing down marizpan and sipping espresso. My iPhone rings. It's Mark on FaceTime. Picture this scene:

Beck sipping coffee. Call sipping beer. On FaceTime, face-to-face, debating with much vivacity the topics we want to engage, then write about. We are typing out our issue via Google Docs (browser-based word-processing) so we can both make corrections on the fly. It's all "No." "Yes." "Maybe, but..." "Add an adverb." "Is that a *fact*?" "If your cute name is 'Call,' mine should be 'Response,' hey." "Bad sentence construction." "Another typo." "Shorten that sentence." "Shit topic."

At times we entertain each other with bits of trivia. Me: "Did you know that Wittgenstein would stand with his back to his astonished audience and recite poems by Rabindranath Tagore?" To which Mark adds, "Astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question, and there is no answer." At times we see who can outdo the other in wordplay:

He: "Beef, it's what's for dinner" (macho cowboy).Me: "Tofu, it's what's for slimmer" (Asian chef).He: "Sheaf, it's what's for shredder" (CIA agent).Me: "Thief, it's what's for sinner." (Christ on the Cross).He: "Kief, it's what's for Sutherland (Donald Sutherland).

He's managed to out-Noonie Noonie! Mark, a Noonie-*revenant,* putting pressure on my present! While so entertained and challenged, the hours pass unnoticed.



Rotisserie Chicken dish as plated as El Nido, Tesuque, NM.

I recall writer Walker Percy noting, "Not to be onto something is to be in despair." So, so wonderful that "Beck 'n Call" are sure *onto* something with their *Carrot*! Wow, we're onto to something so contagious that I often forget to have lunch. Duffy and Snowy are jealous of the time I spend in cyberspace with my co-editor. Oh, their sad expressions as they flank me in my office. *Forgive me dogs*.

After our last issue is completed — hours of work — Mark surprises me once more: "Our relationship, Picky, is like a riddle whose answer one can guess without being able to formulate the question." Zen koan-like enough to keep my mind tumble-drying well past my bedtime. My last thoughts, as I follow my dogs into Slumberland, are of a tantalizing picture on El Nido restaurant's website of their famous Rotisserie Chicken. Yes, that's the place where Mark and I 1st proposed to meet for a romantic dinner, but we've had to keep postponing and postponing an

*

*



poning postponing and postponing due to the severity of the coronavirus spread and the harsher lockdown protocols as November's statistics rise to record levels.



Last day of November and the Immanent Baboon continues his deranged rants about election fraud. Beginning to sound like a broken record of a broken mind. When will the men in the white coats come to haul him away?

His post-election gambit confirms once again that he is more dangerous than the typically dangerous leaders of the past because of two factors: his irrational followers and the enormous powers of the U.S. presidency. Like an annoying fly buzzing in my kitchen, he just won't go away. It will take a S.W.A.T. assault to remove him from the White House.



And as if that isn't enough, the Baboon's lawyer Joe diGenova, appearing on the Howie Carr show, which simulcasts on Newsmax, rants: "Anybody who thinks that this election went well, like that idiot Krebs who used to be the head of cybersecurity [for Trump]. That guy is a class A moron. He should be drawn and

quartered. Taken out at dawn and shot." A not so subtle hint for some right-wing nut-job to carry out the assassination. In addition to threatening Krebs, over the course of the interview diGenova made ominous and false suggestions about "circuit breakers" shutting down on election night in multiple states, which allowed for vote fraud; millions of votes showing up in dump trucks, tow trucks, and vans without detection; and he called on state legislatures to have the "cojones" to overturn the results of the election.

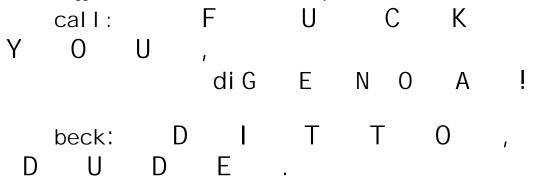
"Picky, it all sounds like a poorly written political thriller," Mary e-mails me.

"Joe diGenova — his name sounds like he's muscle for the Mafia — should be charged with threatening a public official. Criminal if I may say so," Val messages me after asking if I wanted her to come to my house to cut my hair, since her salon is officially closed. I type back a "Yes."

"Depressing. When this is what politics has devolved to, we *are* living the Thirties in Germany again, as farce," comments Vita during our FaceTime conversation.

"Beck, we could put out a special diGenova issue of *The Daily Carrot* in which we editors simply reiterate this dialogue — *Call: Fuck you di Genova! Beck: Di tto, dude. Call: Fuck you di Genova! Beck: Di tto, dude.* — ad infinitum," offers Mark during our editorial brain-storming session. During which, sitting at my desk with its view onto my front yard, I see Moss' leashed dog stop and crap on my front walk, his owner not stopping to pick up the huge lump. *Thanks, Moss.*

I suggest to Mark we do a bad Concrete Poetry take-off of his idea, like this:



As the reiteration continues over several pages, the letters become more spaced out and finally are reduced to a scattering of letters, barely readable as text, across the page.

"Great idea, Beck. I like that our names' letters remain lower case."

"An homage to e.e. cummings, of course. I love his poem *I Carry Your Heart With Me*,"* *I feel myself blushing*. "Nor will our pet names' letters grow apart and scatter as the letters in all caps, increasing in entropy, will do."

"Beck, I carrot a lot about you."

"Call, I carrot for you, too, my rarebit."

* *

Absolutely hard to believe — not referring to Mark and I growing closer — it's December 1st already. Time zooms. Almost against my will — because of my depression due to the pandemic numbness and numbers and ever-present political mayhem — I am pulling down Christmas and Hanukka ornaments from my garage storage shelf, challenging my elderly arms and shoulders to perform middle-aged tasks. Hard work without Noonie or Mark. I take many rest breaks sipping a Dr. Pepper.



Picky's Caganer.

I'm a Jew who likes to celebrate both holidays, okay!? It started way back when I envied my gentile school friends' decorated trees and stacks of wrapped gifts (hey, wasn't Christ a Jew?), but my desire wasn't fully realized until I met Noonie and we had our 1st Christmas together with a Christmas tree decorated to the hilt in the living room and another smaller version in the kitchen hung with food-theme ornaments. I went so far as to get a canine creche complete with a *Caganer* from Barcelona, a figurine depicting the act of defecation appearing in nativity scenes. A figure appropriate in the USA as a symbol of what the Immanent Baboon leaves behind wherever he goes.

It went both ways. Noonie loved the Jewish celebrations, especially the Sader with its lighting of candles to remember the dead. He mastered a certain amount of Hebrew, too. Now having both holidays celebrated in my high desert *Hütte* is a way of maintaining continuity, of honoring my husband's memory, and now honoring Mark.

I message Mark: TOO BUSY WITH CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS AND TREE-TRIMMING TO WORK ON OUR *CARROT* TODAY, PLEASE EXCUSE. He obliges with: OK, IT CAN DANGLE A DAY OR SO, I GUESS. Then I bundle up and brave a cold day's wind to get my mail. The usual bills, catalogues, and . . . no . . . a surprise. I should say *another* surprise. For several weeks someone has been mailing me snapshot-sized photos.

^{*} Cummings 1952 poem (Noonie sent this to me while we were courting):

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in / my heart) i am never without it(anywhere / i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done by only me is your doing, my darling) / i fear / no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want /no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)/and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant /and whatever a sun will always sing is you / here is the deepest secret nobody knows /(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud / and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows / higher than soul can hope or mind can hide) / and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart / i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)





Mail Art (2 gelatin silver prints 4 in. x 2 3/4 in.) Robert Clarke-Davis (2020). Responses to Donald Trump as played out on a Wisconsin sidewalk.

In both color and black-and-white, these images arrive in clear plastic sleeves, no return address, but franked in Milwaukee, WI. I assume they're from Lew Koch, but he lives in Madison, not Milwaukee, and denies they're his images. So, I relish the salt of mystery, the pepper of perfect imagery. These submissions are especially tasty as they recall my child-hood propensity to write and draw on sidewalks with chalk while sucking on a lollipop. When my grandkids visited my Oak Park in the summer, I let them write and draw to their hearts content on my sidewalk. The afternoon rain, effaced their efforts, but they loved it.

These images' flatness, the grid division of the flat surface inherent in the sidewalk construction, enhanced by cast shadows, the Xing-out of political protest — wonderful! I decide to reproduce them here. Although no titles appear on the prints, I secretly title the whole series *Vox Populi*.

Suddenly, a spark. BING! I should take Mark and my *Daily Carrot* concrete poetry idea re: Joe diGenoa (I call him "Joe DeGenerate") and realize it as chalk scribble on my front sidewalk. But, oddly, I can't find my sidewalk chalk and I'm not risking going to Hobby Lobby (it's probably closed anyway) just for that item. My chalk project will have to wait and wait for warmer, drier weather. We might get snow tonight.

About to start trimming my 3-foot, flocked artificial tree with colorful balls full of memories. But I am delayed. Can't find it. I'm going through my box of unpacked, unstacked Christmas music CDs trying to find a French musical song disc with a score for



My small tree with ornaments.

7 voices: basse I, basse chantante, basse pédaliste, baryton, ténor, alto et soprano, 7 well-ordered tessituras, recorded in Notre Dame on a past Christmas Eve. The magnificent cathedral (pre-fire) is featured on the cover. I do find my Bette Midler's Cool Yule CD with her rendition of Bing Crosby's "Mele Kalikimaka" Hawaiian Christmas song. It is a fav of mine and got Noonie's language curiosity up, as seen in a Moleskine notebook entry of his: "Merry Christmas is difficult for Hawaiian speakers to pronounce. Standard Hawaiian does not have the /r/ or /s/ sounds of English and its phonotactic constraints do not permit consonants at the end of syllables or consonant clusters. Cool." Yah, that is inter-

esting, I have to admit. My bet is that I will find that French CD tomorrow, but for now *this* Bette will be a good *ear*-ly option.

The dogs are watching me trim my little tree, seeming to think little treats will fall their way. One does fall, but breaks into slivers of delicate, thin glass. I am annoyed. I am annoyed twice. This tree is a new purchase and yet the middle section of the tree's lights refuses to light. Top, yes. Bottom, yes. Middle, no. A single light must be kaput on that string. I need to put a new string of small lights there. More hassle. But I can do it. I had a

20-year apprenticeship with Noonie spent staring at his deft hands as they worked top to bottom on large Xmas trees from placing the tree topper, to stringing lights, hanging ornaments, candy canes, tinsel garlands, popcorn balls, and always 1 of his dangling gags, in 2012 it was a glitzy glass ornament of a book with a title reading in red: **Epitaph for a Small Winner**. In retrospect, I think my late-hubby secretly defined himself as such: "a small winner." It would've made a good epitaph for him.



As I continue to trim, I wish so much that Mark

could be here to share mulled wine, music, and the thrill of our hands touching as we put ornaments on, each shiny ball having a story behind it.

* *

While I've been busy decorating my home, Mark has taken carrotly matters into his own hands (without telling me!) and put together a tentative and *weird* new issue (1 volume per month, 30 numbers per month) of *The Daily Carrot*:

THE DAILY CARROT

December 3, 2020 Volume 2, Number 3 The Hacker Issue Beck & Call, Editors

Dear Readers: the editors have opened this issue to submissions from people who've illegally hacked our Google-Docs site, messing with previous issues; rather than condemn, I invited them in. Some sent "new" material or proposals for future issues:

Chupacabras: I'm working on a short story, "Iglesia del diablo", in which Satan starts his own religion; people flock to it, but eventually they secretly start practicing the old virtues again.

Dear Chupac, this is old hat. The Republican Party *is* that religion and, no, they haven't yet started practicing the virtues of The Grand Old Party. Sorry.

Fly-On-The-Wall: Here's an excerpt from my fictohistorical novel *A Well-Ventilated Conscience*. It is inspired by Don DeLillo's treatment of the JFK assassination in *Libra* (1988). In place of imagining Lee Harvey Oswald as does DeLillo, I imagine Donald Trump as a child and teen, his upbringing, his early career. I draw on Mary Trump's book, of course, for background material. In this excerpt, Don is getting life guidance from his wealthy father who sits in a large overstuffed chair, while Don sits on a footstool. This man dotes on Don even while demanding great things from him:

You my son, if I am not mistaken (and I never am) are endowed with the perfect degree of mental vacuity required for such a noble profession as Big Wig, destined to wear my pants, such that one day you will be known as "His Pants". But now you must learn to cheat. Start with dominoes, whist, and gin rummy (poker is too vulgar and billiards is just another form of poking). For your physical health and safety, I recommend to you GOLF, a gentleman's game, yet still having its moments of violence and challenging terrain, of firm groping of the iron. Moreover, you are always armed with a weapon during its play, a weapon you can legally carry anywhere. And equip your mind with strong defenses. And girls like it. Yes, girls like tennis, I know, too, but with your - er - physique, well, you'd be, let's say, awkward, son, awkward. At best. Awkward. Son. At best. It's best not to be awkward. At words, awkward, not, too. So be sure you get someone to help you with your school essays, son. Money no object. I won't object. If you find coins in the street, return them to the police; this will permit you to, when older, carry on an affair guilt-free. Ventilate your conscience, my son, it's the window onto unlimited opportunities. Just fix your eyes onto your nose, your unique identity, and stride ahead despite all. Remember: Giving up is really giving down and you never want to go down (except in certain delicate situations of the bedroom). There are two main forces, son, LOVE, which multiples the species (and so disperses wealth), and the NOSE, which subordinates the species to the individual (and so concentrates and increases wealth). Lastly, always remember, hunger is a test for Humanity, not a misfortune, son. It separates the winners from the losers. Maintain an enlightened indifference toward such losers. This will take you far, after all, you live in the greatest city where the expensive sun coins green, spends June and the wind mints thrum, in the greatest capitalist state, in the greatest nation in the world, on the greatest planet in the solar system. Even our 1st intergalactic spaceship, on "Star Trek", was named Enterprise. Hell, yes, son! Hell, yes! Now be sure our good name (it was once Trumpf, heh?) ist nicht blutbefleckt, aber mit Gold bedeckt!

Dear F-O-T-W: Who "nose", we may be publishing more of these excerpts from your book again in the near future,

that is if Iran doesn't nuke us, ha, ha. Now we have another contributor with a poem.

Ah-choo: My real name (really!) is the title of this Green Poem. So like it Eco-critics!

Gesund Fahren-Heit

120 degrees

Fahrenheit and I sneeze.

Gesundheit.

Santa Fe Plaza at Christmas. It's 120 degrees. New Mexico carpeted in perchlorates, Mars the Landscape.

It's been a year since Crash Day.

10,000 dead of heatstroke.

And now

We remember.

At the Plaza, once called

'The Plasma' due to the innoculations,

With Men with Alphorns

and Andean Indians with panpipes conjuring cold. Spectators in swimsuits.

We celebrate despite a low GDP that coexists

with our low lives, low blood sugar.

Bolsonaros trumps Modi who trumps Putin who trumps other ding-dongs.

Now Okinawa's Cape Hedo is near gone without As much as a Buddhist gong.

And the Okinawan dugong* has been long gone. 12,550 dead U.S. Marine WWII coffins sailing the ocean blue.

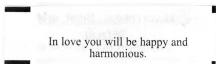
Is there such a thing as FATE?

Dear Ah-Choo: What this thing with German in our last two contributors, huh? Hey, I like it, though. Send more.

- 30 -

There were more submissions that Mark chose, but for my journal entry here, I pick the 3 best (a few were pure argle-bargle). I like the idea behind Mark's special issue. *Nice* gift to me, too. What he's done is very Noonie-ish, I must say. "Legitimate activism" is how I pedantically describe Mark's actions re: the hacking of our little GoogleDocs project and his attempts to draw these cyberspace cowboys into our orbit ("making lemonade out of lemons" as my mother would put it). Can't help but feel Beck 'n Call are becoming a team. despite the sorry fact our contact is purely virtual.

^{*} The dugong: a medium-sized marine mammal, 1 of 4 living species of the order Sirenia, which also includes 3 species of manatees. It is the only living representative of the once-diverse family Dugongidae; its closest modern relative, Steller's sea cow, was hunted to extinction in the 18th century.



If I think the odds of finding someone as compatible as I was with Noonie is high. Shit. Just see what I just saw on GMA. Imagine the odds that



PowerBall Lotto numbers.



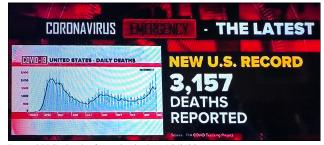
My broken wood sculpture minus its top.

the PowerBall Lotto numbers would fall from 5 to 10 in a perfect sequence! It's a dream right out of Noonie's Numerics. I take this as a good omen. Adding to this astonishing roll of the cosmic dice, is the fact the Lu Lu's fortune cookie I opened last night predicts what I've hoped for, further underscoring my intu-

itions that Mark is, indeed, remarkable.

So with all this good luck surrounding me, why did I fall off a short ladder while trimming my 3-foot Christmas tree an hour ago and, in doing so, tip my tall wooden modernist sculpture, breaking its tip off (see photo). I bruised my wrist, banged my hip, and reduced myself to tears. If there was luck here, it was that I didn't break my neck or back. I tremble to think about lying *in situ* until death claimed me. *I've fallen and I can't get up*.

I know if I called Call, he'd come running, but that would put both of us at risk of even more danger. I will call him, but play down the incident in so doing.



Record U.S. deaths for a single day, 12/2/20.

The restoration job will be expensive, but necessary. In light of the miseries suffered by so many of my fellow citizens right now, this domestic smash-up is small potatoes. I could've been 1 of those 3,157 deaths yesterday.

31.0

I let word out about my fall and my sadly decapitated wood sculpture:

Picky - Melanie - her daughter - her ex-husband

- \rightarrow Mark \rightarrow Old Wood LLC \rightarrow Picky
- → Mary → her home handyman → Picky
- "→ Flo "→ Abe "→ Lambo
- ➡ Mazatl ➡ his wife ➡ Gary ➡ Picky
- → Vitalina → Basia Irland → Valentina → Picky

Some sympathy calls and advice come in.

RING: Abe's handyman says he can fix the sculpture, for a price.
RING: Mazatl give me names of wooden sculpture restorers in Santa Fe.
RING: Old Wood LLC calls after Call calls them to call me.
RING: Gary, my realtor, says the wood damage can be repaired.
RING: Valentina tries to cheer me up with some wacky stories/jokes. The very worst: *My sister once had an affair with a carnival dwarf; she told me later, 'the fellow found it an enlarging experience.'*

Val offers to send me a special comfrey cream to heal my scrapes and bruises. Then we are onto the Governor's strict coronavirus countermeasures, telling me that to make extra money during the salon lockdown, she and her sister, Valeria (a.k.a., Nori), are selling specialty items via her salon's website, like dolphin-shaped vibrators and custom T-shirts.

"Pick, five per cent of the sales go toward dolphin rescue. And my sister 'Nori' [I met her once, pigeon's eyes with mascara fly-squashed in the corners, eats tons of seaweed, wearing a root beer-colored cashmere sweater] got laid off from a frozen yogurt shop, Yotopia, so is making personalized T-shirts for our online biz. Has a Tee out depicting a single flying wasp below which reads "Wasps do not swarm" (Richard Jones); the back reproduces a photo of a swarm of unmasked Trumpites and the declaration: Oh, yeh!?"

"Hey, Val, there's a New York band called 'The Flying W.A.S.P.s' known for Yacht Rock, a broad music aesthetic associated with soft rock."

"Oh, Nori has a Tee with that band's logo, a black sailboat silhouetted against a large yellow sun, in her personal collection. It inspired that new T-shirt of hers."

"Noonie once mentioned that band with it's brand of smooth, mellow music that early yuppies enjoyed while sipping champagne and snorting cocaine on their yachts in the seventies and early eighties. Back then, he worked in the Hollywood film biz, witnessing such scenes of excess."

"Picky, I'm freaked out."

"Over what?"

"Well, didn't that PowerBall thing with the numbers in perfect sequence, stand out as weird? And then, the same day, a sequence of metal failures leads to that huge telescope in Puerto Rico collapsing just as a drone was fortuitously flying there to record it."



Nine hundred tons of metal falls onto the 1000-ft dish below.



Arecibo Telescope collapse, Puerto Rico.

"Weird. Arecibo explored pulsars, expanded our knowledge of Mercury and spotted exo-planets."

"And found fast radio bursts that might be signals of alien life, Pick. Aliens might've done something."

"Hey, ever read Philip K. Dick's *Radio Free Albemuth*, Val? Alien-encrypted broadcasts over pop music radio stations."

"Yah. Shit! Similar stuff, Pick. And I can't help think there's a strange connection between the sudden rise in COVID cases, Giuliani's dripping hair coloring, the PowerBall Lotto's astonishing sequence, and this collapse."

Yes, I'm hearing those famous musical notes from the "The Twilight Zone" theme echoing in my *cabeza*.

What can I say to Val? How about: "Easy breezy . . . lemon squeezy."

Val goes on to postulate that my tumble off the ladder was connected to these events. Although I'm okay, no serious injuries, she still suggests smudging (i.e., burning white sage) to purify myself and my living room. "Get rid of all the negative shit, Pick. I can rush a Sage Kit your way, deary, via Amazon Prime."

When I kindly refuse, she segues to inquiring about my "LLL" (love-life-lately). I bring her up to date re: Mark(able) and *moi*. The pluses, the minuses. The quadratic equations: "He sent me a prefect holiday gift, *Holidays on Ice* by David Sedaris. Noonie had him as student back when. He says the book mentions 'White Paw Mall' and thought of my Snowy. How cute is that, huh? Then he told me that due to teenage acne, he has scars on his back. 'But I tell women I got them in a mountain climbing accident,' he confesses."

"Wow!" She's delighted, "You *should* have someone who really understands you, is honest, forthcoming, loves your dogs. Oh, and that *Daily Carrot* you both are munching on sounds sweet and healthy for both of you. And *[a little snicker]* a little carrot-and-the-stick may speed things up romantically. . . . By the way, I also sell carrot-shaped dildos on our site. Pick, soon — post-COVID — Mark'll get to know the pitch of your buzz, the intensity of your biz, the rufous hue of your well-tanned tender throat, and your fondness for comfort and comfrey. If you'll just let me send a jar of the same your way. . ."

She asks after my dogs, Duffy and Snowy, a topic I always use to break the ice with new dentists, doctors, and hairdressers. After I add yet another yarn to the list of Dogs & I



canine adventures, about how responsive we 3 creatures are to each other — Picky, Duffy, and Snowy — enhanced by us being so isolated, she pitches a bit of Christian pedantry my way: "Why it's sheer *perichoresis*, Picky, the revolving interrelation between you three. Perichoresis is the dance of love. We all relate to one another in the 'dance of life' on this planet. The relationships between the three Persons of the Trinity —

dynamic, interactive, loving, serving — form the model for our human dance steps."

A spade digging up interesting tidbits of data, Val, goes on to tell me about a series of "amazing books on animals, the Reaktion Animal Series. So informative, stuff you'd never guess about animals."

"I've heard of it, the University of Chicago Press distributes them."

"I'm reading the volume *Chicken* by Annie Potts. Did you know, Pick, that the viable chicken embryo positions itself, prior to hatching, to hear to its own heart beat and the sounds of the world outside the egg!"

"Like it might decide, Val, that the world out there already has too much egg on its face, and ain't a good place to break into?" We both laugh.

"Actually, Picky, I was thinking of you."

"Watcha mean?"

"I think, from what you've just told me about Mark and you, that you *are* that embryo, still a bit chicken, listening to your heart and monitoring the coming coronavirus vaccine, envisioning breaking your shell, coming out into a post-COVID world and a new relationship in 2021."

Wow, I think. Then am treated to, over the phone, the blaring boom-box sounds of "Do the Macarena":

Dale a tu cuerpo alegría Macarena Que tu cuerpo es pa' darle alegria y cosa buena Dale a tu cuerpo alegria Macarena Hey Macarena



Ann Quin, 1960s.

"Turn it down Nori!.... Oh, Pick, that's Valeria." She's reminding me, after reading some of your ongoing journal entries, that you might read British author Ann Quin's novels as many of her characters are isolated, sequestered in cramped quarters, mired in their own anxieties, and several of them keep journals. She says Quin's 1st published novel, *Berg* [1964], won her the University of New Mexico's D. H. Lawrence Fellowship. Oh, and she says

Quin's novel *Three* might be relevant due to your repeated reference to your dead hubby's 'thing' with numbers; the book has just been released again forty-five years after her suicide," Val adds. "Oops, sorry. A painful word for you."

Less painful now. "Say hi to Valeria. Yah, my late-husband was into her wildly careening verbs. Her words, he said, were like bumper-cars. I know about her. An interesting clinical case, her depression, repeated hospitalizations, shock treatments. Thought she could communicate via telepathy. Her books bespeak her agonized inarticulateness. Paragraphs break off mid-sentence, sentences bust up into shards."

"Nori s*tresses* the weird thing about that [the 3,4,5] number sequence hidden within the Quin data [a novel titled 3 republished 45 years after her death]. She's saying, 'Be sure to tell Picky about this weird shit.' So I'm telling."



"Thanks, you two V's. Yah, given those PowerBall results... Easy breezy...lemon squeezy!" A bit wacky, Val is, but she's big hearted. At times it seems she can see deeper into me than I do myself. Moreover, she'd do anything for you. Like come out during this lockdown and cut my hair in my front yard. Which she said she'll do as soon the noon temperature rises to 47 degrees and the wind is nil. She's ACES, spades and hearts.

I tell her I have a shit load of laundry to do. Say goodbye to Valeria, too. Both wish me the best. We hang up. I don't have a load to wash. My both my hip and knee are bothering me. I want to just sit quietly in my relaxing chair, put my legs into the massage machine, and do a little Zen meditation. If Val knew of my post-fall ouwies, I'd never get her off the phone.

As my body relaxes — the dogs flanking me, asleep — I start to envision some of my favorite colors: lemon and canary yellow, cadmium orange and cherry red, burnt sienna, yellow ochre, barite and cadmium green, chartreuse, azure blue, turquoise and teal, cool black and warm white — all present on a hard satin finish. Ah! Like the colors of Donald Judd and Frank Stella sculptures which Noonie and I marveled at on our last trip to New York museums. My dead hubby and I did share deep connections to color. As kids, we both had a huge box of crayons with exotically named colors, and loved using it. After we met, on our world travels, we often spent hours discoursing about the sites, art, and food in terms of hue, saturation, intensity. This passion for color, whether on canvas, metal, or in a garden, was a glue binding us. Mark shows a similar appreciation for color, from what he's said and shown me during our FaceTime sessions.

My iPad dings. A message. The device is in my lap. It knocks me out of my reverie. It's what I call a sad/happy message from Flo (her kids call her by her 1st name):

Ok, so you know I am currently on a high daily dose of Prednisone for my RA (along with Meloxicam and Hydrocodone) until the Xeljanz kicks in again (hopefully by Christmas!!!). And yes, I might be feeling just a "wee bit" steroid cranky.... okay, so even I don't like myself right now.... Well... Abe literally took his life into his own hands.... Right now I am struggling with just about everything and Abe even has to help me dress. Yesterday while he was trying to

pull up my tight fitting denim leggings, he had the nerve (bravery? stupidity?) to say, "Jesus, these things are snug" (I know I heard him say "tight" but he swears he didn't say that). Keep in mind I have my permit to carry concealed and have my Glock 43, Smith & Wesson .380 and my S&W .38 all loaded. I didn't say a word but just gave him one of those death looks women give men when they are being stupid and then we both busted out laughing. Close call there! I don't feel well enough right now to have to make funeral arrangements on top of everything else!

Ha ha ha. Just wanted to share the funny domestic story. Even when things are bad, there are times that can make us smile and laugh. Abe has been my savior through this. I seriously don't know what I'd do without him. Or my kids.

— Flo

Whoa! Here I am drifting off into hue and intensity-land, and BINGO! I am hit with the hue and cry of pain and its anodyne's effects. I'd forgotten about her persistent bout with rheumatoid arthritis (RA). Now I feel guilty about my meager complaints. She's fortunate she has Abe, though. Are my dogs going to be able to dress me when the time comes? Ha! It will be nursing home here I come . . . unless . . . unless I have an able-bodied guy about.

Taking about *that guy*, I notice an e-mail from Mark. "Beck, wish I could call on you personally to discuss this list, but . . . well . . . read and message me later (wish it could be 'massage me later'). My list could be grist for a special 'Lockdown Issue' of *The Daily Carrot*." The issue could be introduced with a reproduction of Tintoretto's famous painting *San Rocco Heals Plague Victims* (1549). Some of these comments would, in my view, shame those clowns who ignore lockdown measures. They could be interspersed with news photos snatched from TV by you." There then follows the results of his thorough research:

- Keats: Quarantined from typhus on a boat in Naples, he relishes his books.
- **Giovanni Boccaccio:** Speaks of a deadly pestilence which had earlier originated in the Orient; people quarantine (*The Decameron*).
- Daniel Defoe: "I learned to look on the bright side of my condition, and less on the dark side, and to consider what I enjoyed rather than what I wanted" (*Robinson Crusoe*).
- Johann David Wyss: "If it be the will of God," said my wife, "to leave us alone on this solitary place, let us be content; and rejoice that we are all together in safety" (*Swiss Family Robinson*).
- Issac Newton: In quarantine from bubonic plague, he did some of his most important work during isolation.
- Ruth Asawa: Locked away in a U.S. Japanese internment camp during WWII: "Sometimes good comes from adversity."
- Harriet Jacobs: hid in an attic for seven years to avoid returning to slavery.
- Anne Frank: (in her diary) "I treat all the privations as amusing."
- Nelson Mandela: "I found solitary confinement the most forbiding aspect of prison life. There is no end and no beginning; there's only one's mind, which can begin to play tricks.... One begins to question everything."
- Eldridge Cleaver: "In prison, those things withheld and denied to the prisoner become precisely what he wants most of all."
- Alexander Solzhlenitsyn: "You should rejoice that you're in prison. Here you have time to think about your soul" (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*).

- Katherine Anne Porter: she caught the Spanish flu, spent 6 months in the hospital, nearly dying; when she was released, she discovered her fiancé had died of the flu (the basis for her novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*).
- Thomas Mann: "Solitude gives birth to the original in us, to beauty unfamiliar and perilous — to poetry. But also, it gives birth to the opposite: to the perverse, the illicit, the absurd" (*Death in Venice*).
- Mary Shelley: In her novel *The Last Man*, when a pandemic spreads across the world, her protagonist returns home to isolation "as the storm-driven bird does [to] the nest in which it may fold its wings in tranquility."
- Janet Frame: After spending many years isolated in a mental hospital, this New Zealand award-winning author commented: "I have discovered that my freedom is within me, and nothing can destroy it."
- Francesco Petrarch: "While I am lamenting in vain and unburdening my spirit of these sorrows, I am accusing men who cannot reply; if only dear friend, they had followed your physical action as they always did in purpose, and had been willing to lie low with us in our trusty home and retreat from the plague, which was so conspicuously laying waste to Rome and Naples. I rejoice that you did so and thank you for thinking my roof worthy to shelter in while our country was suffering from these same evils" (Petrarch's letter to Boccaccio re: friends who did not isolate and died).

Mark stresses the importance of us writing: "It seems the only thing that is not a petroleum byproduct or a neat capsule available without prescription." He then attaches a TV news screen-shot he's made, adding his disgust for Trump's Georgia rally "stuffed with the unmasked all in close confinement and fed blatant lies by the Immanent Baboon. Use this flick in our 'Aggressive Truth' section, Beck":



Cases peaking as Christmas approaches (12/6/20).

I am very impressed with Call's call-to-arms here. The material could be put into a rousing new exuberance, amplitude, compared to past issues. It's purpose bears down on me with its enlightening vision as I envision dangling this carrot before a larger audience at, say, *Occupy Democrats*. But maybe my thoughts of amplitude here are, in part, the result of a rare hot flash that has, *mais oui*, turned me red as a beet, urging me to *rapidement* become *en déshabille* while still resting in my overstuffed *chaise*.

Noonie's Ghost [an ectoplasm]: Your flash has summoned I. Aye, to see by the soft light of your iPad your cleavage of creamy impasto, your outline, a refinement of line, in a time not of I. I no longer be enflesh'd. So go forth my love and find your new mark in live flesh. I slip away now . . . [Disappears.]

I thought I just heard a whisper; felt a breeze; sensed a summons. I feel lighter of being, being happy. I see Snowy's tail sticking straight up, vibrating, she's seeing, seeing as if she's seen a mouse. No. . . . It's nothing.

I open the TV room door an inch to let cold air waft my steaming body.

After a 60s seconds, it's back to editorial biz. The *pièce de résistance* of Mark's aforementioned message is this hilarious inclusion of what he urges should be the issue's *dénouement*: a wacky, but appropriate, Christmas card . Mark comments: "Citizens should all copy and send this card to the Immanent Baboon via snail-mail, e-mail, Twitter, Instagram, Amazon drone delivery, inside boxes of Girl Scout cookies offered at his door, distributed at Trump golf courses disguised as golf score pads, folded and sent as paper airplanes shot over the White House fence, et cetera.":



Now that's the holiday spirit for you!

I send this illustration as an e-card to Vitalina, writing: "This can be our comic version of *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, Batman standing in for both Judith and Abra. Ya grok?"

* *



"Don's Take," editorial commentary on CNN, December 8, 2020.



Picky's Christo-Jewish Celebration Shirt. "I dream: I'm in a painting wearing this shirt frying latkes, turning toward the viewer." — Picky Hunting.

Troubling news. The GOP is still giving support to the Immanent Baboon's delusional claims of election fraud. Like fanatic Hitler supporters during the last days of the Third Reich. It's a national disgrace; the world is laughing at us. I'm watching news anchor Don Lemon (recorded last night) look down in shame while reporting same. I blush, too. What a way to enter our holiday season. Political riffs, COVID deaths, unemployment, hunger, anger. A diminished world. I can't imagine if I had to face the holidays without Mark's (albeit virtual) presence in my life.

For those who have recently lost someone, what lies ahead in December is the deadly melancholy of the Holiday Season, whether it be Christmas or Hanukkah.

For Noonie and I, our holiday season was 2-sided: Christian and Jewish. We celebrated the best of both traditions. Oy vey! We even had holiday season shirts, celebrating both traditions, which we'd don for our December holiday dinners. Since my hubby's death, I haven't worn mine. But now that my gentle Gentile, Mark, beckons — tells me, "Inside you hides a soft,

secret pink balloon of dreams" - I decide to again pull this soft garment over my heart this



Picky, Stars in her Eyes (collage, jpeg sent to Mark), Picky Hunting (1947/2018).



My sun-loving bougainvillea.

holiday season. Seeing his Picky in such garb will surprise Mark when I call him, FaceTiming a synchronous Christmas Day dinner with my new sweetie whose wonderful laugh tickles through me.

In our chat yesterday, we both decide our dinners should be identical pick-up selections from Santa Fe's famous Rio Chama restaurant's *prix fixe* menu:

1st course: BOURBON BRAISED PORK BELLY (creamy polenta, cotija cheese, bacon vinaigrette); 2nd course: POTATO LEEK SOUP; 3rd course: HERB CRUSTED CHATEAUBRIAND (filet mignon, crispy yukon gold potatoes, mushrooms, red wine jus, asparagus); dessert course: AMARENA CHERRY RICE PUDDING. But we add a personalized *amuse bouche*, a large boiled carrot.

Yes, a dinner during which we will move from sobriety to intoxication, from sense to nonsense, from reality to dream, from waking to sleeping. A feast to be experienced in as many dimensions as possible, given the cruel separation between us. A separation that *now* seems more cruel than my separation from Noonie. Did I just write *that?* For late that Christmas Day night, despite (I imagine) all our alliterative flourishes, pinkly personalized porny party jokes, I will not be able to say in RL: "I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes." I will remain a half-formed thing for awhile longer. Yet despite that, oh, yes, it will be most memorable, most memorable, our dinner.

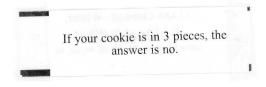
Walk, know your way. See the here. Hear the sea. Waves on a smooth beach and rough rocks. It is impossible to contemplate the

life of the tide pools without seeing it as analogous to the life of the spirit.

Despite my isolation, I feel strong and safe. In the bathroom mirror I see a new Self. Now, when I hear sleet falling, I will not feel that usual fathomless infinite loneliness. Sophocles was wrong when he said: "Not to be born is far best."

The dogs follow me to the kitchen, where I notice my bougainvillea house-plant is thriving, sending joyous flowers toward the sky. I start my bacon sizzling and make to boil water for soft-boiled eggs. Yes, the world has been reduced during this plague year, but it is still here, solid, tangible, as real as the white fluffy fur of my little dog Snowy standing between my legs.

As I stand, waiting for the egg-timer to go off, my thoughts return to the very odd Lu Lu's fortune cookie I opened last night; kept me awake thinking about it for when I cracked the cookie, it broke into 3 parts:

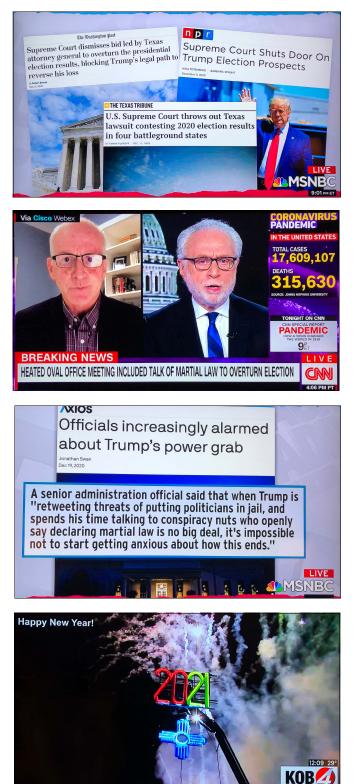


What was my question?

— The End —

[Dear Reader, a sequel, Picky Unchained, will soon follow this volume.]

EPILOGUE



Goodbye 2020 and Good Riddance! (2021) Picky Hunting.

As the New Year approaches, momentous events are occurring:

The Electoral College confirms Biden as President; Trump's former national security advisor, Michael Flynn, and conspiracy nut Sidney Powell, advise the President to impose martial law to force new elections in battleground states.

The coronavirus vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna are being distributed; we are nearing 18,000,000 total cases and 316,000 deaths in the U.S. from COVID. Trump is silent on the issue.

The Great Conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter on 12/21/2020, the last notable in 1623; and, The Great Conjunction of Beck 'n Call, parked cars side-by-side, inside our masked faces in windows rolled down, eyes riveted on each other, our future seen in the stars.

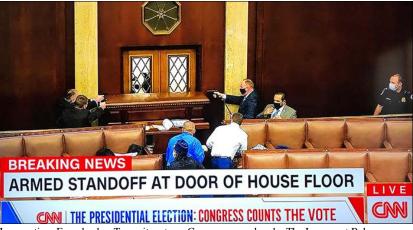
Dems win 2 senate seats thanks to Georgia electorate. But our country still troubled. Mob action in the streets. Willful destruction of COVID vaccine doses by a pharmacist.

A defiant Congress / Senate. Nashville bombed by conspiracy nut. More Black men murdered by police. Trump's total indifference to the fact.

Trump and side-kick Rudy Giuliani urging mob action. Result is the shocking and deadly January 6^{th} insurrection.

I buy a Trump-on-a-rocket piñata and pummel it to pieces (see page adjacent to page 209) for good measure on the New Year.

Welcome 2021!



Insurrection: Four dead as Trumpites storm Congress, urged on by The Immanent Baboon.



Insurrectionist thug occupies Nancy Pelosi's office, White House.

(CNN, 1-6-2021) Vice President Mike Pence released a statement on his role moments before Wednesday's joint session of Congress, saying that he cannot submit to demands he overthrow the results of the November election.

We are strange animals on a shared planet, tethered to each other by our social and biological dependence, by the complex networks that govern our lives and deaths. Only in a society deformed by individualism could this fact be repackaged as a mystical insight.

- Emily Harnett, in "Back From the Afterlife".

* * *



The Fruit of the Old and the Flower of the New (2021) Picky Hunting.

A Checklist of JEF Titles

* Winners of the Kenneth Patchen Award for the Innovative Novel

- □ 0 Projections by Eckhard Gerdes
- \Box 2 Ring in a River by Eckhard Gerdes
- □ 3 The Darkness Starts Up Where You Stand by Arthur Winfield Knight
- □ 4 Belighted Fiction
- □ 5 Othello Blues by Harold Jaffe
- □ 9 Recto & Verso: A Work of Asemism and Pareidolia by Dominic Ward & Eckhard Gerdes (Fridge Magnet Edition)
- □ 9B Recto & Verso: A Work of Asemism and Pareidolia by Dominic Ward & Eckhard Gerdes (Trade Edition)
- □ 11 Sore Eel Cheese by The Flakxus Group (Limited Edition of 25)
- □ 14 Writing Pictures: Case Studies in Photographic Criticism 1983-2012 by James R. Hugunin
- □ 15 Wreck and Ruin: Photography, Temporality, and World(Dis)order by James R. Hugunin
- □ 17 John Barth, Bearded Bards & Splitting Hairs
- □ 18 99 Waves by Persis Gerdes
- □ 22 The Chronicles of Michel du Jabot by Eckhard Gerdes
- □ 23 The Laugh that Laughs at the Laugh: Writing from and about the Pen Man, Raymond Federman
- □ 24 A-Way with it!: Contemporary Innovative Fiction
- □ 28 Paris 60 by Harold Jaffe
- □ 29 The Literary Terrorism of Harold Jaffe
- □ 33 Apostrophe/Parenthesis by Frederick Mark Kramer
- □ 34 Journal of Experimental Fiction 34: Foremost Fiction: A Report from the Front Lines
- □ 35 Journal of Experimental Fiction 35
- \Box 36 Scuff Mud (cd)
- □ 37 Bizarro Fiction: Journal of Experimental Fiction 37
- □ 38 *ATTOHO* #1 (cd-r)
- □ 39 Journal of Experimental Fiction 39
- □ 40 Ambiguity by Frederick Mark Kramer
- □ 41 Prism and Graded Monotony by Dominic Ward
- □ 42 Short Tails by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- □ 43 Something Is Crook in Middlebrook by James R. Hugunin
- □ 44 Xanthous Mermaid Mechanics by Brion Poloncic
- □ 45 OD: Docufictions by Harold Jaffe
- □ 46 How to Break Article Noun by Carolyn Chun*
- □ 47 Collected Stort Shories by Eric Belgum
- □ 48 What Is Art? by Norman Conquest
- □ 49 Don't Sing Aloha When I Go by Robert Casella
- □ 50 Journal of Experimental Fiction 50
- \Box 51 Oppression for the Heaven of It by Moore Bowen*
- □ 52 Elder Physics by James R. Hugunin
- □ 53.1 Like Blood in Water: Five Mininovels (The Placebo Effect Trilogy #1) by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- □ 53.2 The Future of Giraffes: Five Mininovels (The Placebo Effect Trilogy #2) by Yuriy Tarnawsky

- □ 53.3 View of Delft: Five Mininovels (The Placebo Effect Trilogy #3) by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- □ 54 You Are Make Very Important Bathtime by David Moscovich
- □ 55 Minnows: A Shattered Novel by Jønathan Lyons
- □ 56 *Meanwhile* by Frederick Mark Kramer
- □ 58A Tar Spackled Banner by James R. Hugunin
- □ 58B Return to Circa '96 by Bob Sawatzki*
- □ 60 Case X by James R. Hugunin
- □ 61 Naked Lunch at Tiffany's by Derek Pell
- □ 62 Tangled in Motion by Jane L. Carman
- □ 64 *The Hunter* by Dominic Ward
- □ 65 A Little Story about Maurice Ravel by Conger Beasley, Jr.
- □ 66 *Psychedelic Everest* by Brion Poloncic
- □ 67 Between the Legs by Kate Horsley*
- □ 68 Claim to Oblivion: Selected Essays and Interviews by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- □ 69 Passions and Shadows or Shadows and Passions by Frederick Mark Kramer
- □ 70 Afterimage: Critical Essays on Photography by James R. Hugunin
- □ 71 Goosestep by Harold Jaffe
- □ 72 Science Fiction: A Poem! by Robin Wyatt Dunne
- □ 73 Offbeat/Quirky
- □ 74 *Mouth* by Charles Hood*
- \Box 75 $Q \leftrightarrow A$ by James R. Hugunin
- □ 76 *Literary Yoga* by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- □ 77 Experimental Literature: A Collection of Statements edited by Jeffrey R. Di Leo and Warren Motte
- □ 78 The Skrat Prize Memorial Anthology by R.M. Strauss*
- □ 79 Black Scat Books: A Bibliography 2012 2018 compiled by Grace Murray
- □ 80 Finding Mememo by James R. Hugunin
- □ 81 Porn-anti-Porn by Harold Jaffe
- **2** 82 Understanding Franklin Thompson by Jim Meirose
- □ 83 Warm Arctic Nights by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- □ 84 The Iguanas of Heat by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- □ 85 Death at Half Mast by Denis Emorine
- □ 86 Those Brave As the Skate Is by Patrick Keller*
- □ 87 The Marble Corridor by Ryan Madej
- □ 88 Crocodile Smiles by Yuriy Tarnawsky
- □ 89 *Plague City* by Genelle Chaconas*
- □ 90 *Picky Hunting* by James R. Hugunin
- □ 91 "The Greatest Place on Earth": A Personal Note: A Work of Absurdity? by Jeff Weisman
- □ 92 Own Little Worlds by Cal Massey*
- □ 93 Picky Unchained by James R. Hugunin
- □ 94 Picky's Constant Conversation by James R. Hugunin

James Hugunin

Docu-Fiction

Picky Hunting: A Journal of the Plague Year

finds Picky Hunting, a retired Jewish psychoanalyst with a strong background in English Literature (B.A. and M.A. from the University of Chicago) and a recent widow, fleeing the Chicago area where she's lived all her life, to resettle in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She hopes to find solace in nature, study Indigenous culture, write, pursue photography, and may even develop a new love interest. Within six months of her arrival, however, the march of His Evil Majesty COVID XIX through the world forces a lockdown in her adopted state.



Self-Portrait with Broken Heart (2020) Picky Hunting.

Just beginning to make friends, join a NewComers Club, travel, discover superb cuisine, enjoy musical concerts, and respond to online dating postings, the forced isolation suddenly blunts her drive toward new experiences and companionship. Her loneliness is abated to some extent by her two Black & White scotch label-looking dogs. Soon, Picky sees an opportunity. Inspired by Daniel Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year (1722), Katherine Anne Porter's Pale Horse, Pale Rider (1939), and Albert Camus' The Plaque (1947), Picky decides to hone her writing skills by daily tracking her life during the terrible reigns of "COVID XIX" and President Donald "Immanent Baboon" Trump.

Throughout, Picky is haunted by the death of her husband (suicide or murder?), by his memory and continuing influence. Can she move past her past and open herself to love again?

James Hugunin is emeritus faculty from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago where he taught art history and contemporary theory for over 35 years. He founded two art journals: the much-praised L. A. art journal *The Dumb* Ox (1976) and *U-Turn* (1982). In 1983, he won the Reva and David Logan Award for Distinguished New Writing in Photography. Besides his extensive critical writings, since 2012 he's authored several

books of award-winning experimental fiction. He is a member of the Society of Midland Authors. He now resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico with his psychoanalyst wife, Marianne.

