

# Journal of a Falling Man



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The manuscript for this memoir was found abandoned on a closet shelf in a vacant apartment in New York City.

The anonymous author seemed to be struggling to make sense of his life by relying on a strange concoction of philosophy, self-indulgence, pure nonsense, self-help advice, random readings, cathartic ranting, and some clever turns of phrase.

The text is unclear about whether he intended it to be published but there is perhaps enough here of entertainment value to warrant this edition.

There were apparently more parts to the Journal, but only the first section is reproduced here. The remaining parts were never found nor was the identity of the author ever discovered.

His fate too remains a mystery.

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, names, incidents, organizations, and dialogue in this novel are either the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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1.

## THE WINDOW

There I was again.

One more time.

Standing at the window yet again today and imagining the drop. Down and down and down to dusty dread on that cold pavement; so appealing, so horrifying.

I thought about 32 feet per second per second again too, but I never really knew what that meant. It was not just another numbing number, but something about acceleration, I think. About the inevitable pull of the centers of things because the whole damn universe is warped around density.

The bowling ball on the mattress kind of thing.

How long would it take to splat from ten stories up? A few seconds, I guess. Not much time at all really. And yet it seemed like an eternity in which to doubt or rue or wish I had thought better of it. The universe may be warped out of whack...but that means that time is irked too. Elastic and bendable.

The upshot for me? There is always time enough for regret.

It was 6:00am then, the hour of impossibility.

The long dreary night was over and sunlight was golding the windows on the buildings across the street. On the other side of them, I figured, moms were making pancakes, dads tying that striped tie, kids stuffing their backpacks. Everyone turning on their phones. A new day, new plans. You have to admire people who fight the gravity.

I do. I am just not sure that I can anymore.

Naturally I did not follow through. I did not jump or leap or even slip. When I stepped away yet one more time, it was not because I changed my mind. It was because some words occurred to me that had to be written down. That's the way it is lately. This feeling that words need to be typed...in the precise same way that objects need to fall. A different kind of pull to another center entirely. But before committing them to paper, I sat still for a long time wondering if anyone else was out there writing instead of leaping.

The fact is that the opposite of depression is not elation, as the upbeat seem to think. No, the opposite of depression is preoccupation. To make a thing is to be alive and what you make - great or rotten - is proof of it. The density of made things has its own pull.

In that sense, it is the words that save me each and every time. Writers, real writers that is, write to

be read. But not me. In fact, if you are reading this right now, just stop and get hold of yourself. You will find nothing useful here. I am writing this only because the words must be written because of the curvature of the continuum. I am writing this so that the mass of the words might warp my tiny universe one more time. I am writing solely to avoid that window for a few words more.

Maybe, just maybe, I can even dump enough words to heap a pile so high that it will cushion the landing - just like the bowling ball on the mattress - and bounce me right back up through the window. Unwarp the universe for a moment. Reverse gravity. Undensify. Now that would be a sight to see.

Or maybe not. It sounds wrong when I read it.  
Time will tell.

2.

## THE CELL

Sometimes this room with its rear window feels mostly like a cell.

A reliable narrator would tell you much about it: the precise dimensions in lonely paces, the length and the width endlessly measured; how high the unreachable ceiling is; texture of the walls and how they feel to claw. Or bang your head against.

But I am not reliable.

The truth is that after so much time here, I can no longer tell the difference between the cell in my

fancy and the cell that is the world all around me. Cells. Hooke called them that because they looked like the rooms in a monastery. The world is made up of them but then again, the world itself as a cell for holding in.

I cannot tell you why I am here. Jailed, no doubt, for some crime that I committed, but for the life of me I cannot say what or when. Maybe it was before I was born. Or perhaps I am here under false pretenses...a simple case of mistaken identity. Yes, an identity that is mistaken! That sounds exactly right when I put it that way.

I have never seen my jailers, whoever they are. I only know they are there because I am here. And they have given me just barely enough to live on. More than that actually. They have given me just enough to build a fakery with. A dream world to replace the cell for a few minutes each day. Moving pictures of voluptuous women, a well-tuned piano, various writing materials. You see what I mean? Just enough. And that is some kind of life, is it not?

On the other hand, it may be the case that I have concocted my own existence here.

Just now I heard the sound of a bird, perhaps on the sill outside the window. A pigeon no doubt; it was making that absurd goobling noise they make. A bird is a marvel and a better person would have rushed to find and admire it. I did not. Instead I burst into tears because I knew that if I looked,



behind the bird would be the ravishing ravenous rushing world with all of its whichway and thatway and skeltering helter. All too much to manage.

Metaphors are nice. And omens are too. But behind them comes the actual world gushing in.

I realized then that the window was not just an exit...it was a barrier. A barricade against everything that is the case (thanks Wittgenstein), everything out there. Panes against the pain, so to speak. A kind of insurance so that I could lie in the bed looking out, occupied with delusions that satisfy me, confronted by the occasional truth, filled with fantastical hope and unreasonable despair. Or vice versa. Listening for birds and trying to ignore them.

A room, in other words, so perfectly cell-like that you can never leave it. And a window so open that you cannot go out through it.

3.

### **THE PERCENT**

Of faith, I have none, I am proud to say.

God, truth, love, the future...I don't believe in any of them. I live my life, if you can call it that, in a room with a window, filled with nothing of any consequence and nothing to become.

You might think that having zero faith in anything is tragic...what is there to live for after all? But the opposite is true since the hollow becomes the source of great comfort. Without myths and

legends to propel you, there is nowhere to go and no reason to get there. It is a kind of zennish state of momentary acceptance of the here and now. Oh yes and let us not forget...spiced by a healthy dose of despair.

Naturally, being a practical man who can fix a faucet if needed, I understand the underpinnings. I know that the universe is meaningless, a random collision of genes and molecules and stories. Quarks that spin. Galaxies spin. Taletellers spin. And then somewhere in the midst we swirl out our lives. Given this, you have to ask yourself...is it enough to add our tiny momentum to the grand spinning of the universe? Our unmeasurable weight to the overall density? I doubt it, but in the end it does not matter. Fate, karma, luck, or happenstance...call it what you will. There is no one there to explain or judge or even weigh in on the matter. There is no explanation.

I find that rather cozy.

Think of it this way: of the 100 billion people who have ever lived out their lives on the planet earth, only 1 million have entries in Wikipedia. In other words, less than 1000<sup>th</sup> of 1% of the people who ever lived are worth remembering one way or another. For the rest of us, the 99.99999%, our lives and what we did or loved or fought for or against - or believed - is all erased from the story of the world once the people who knew us are gone.

Comforting, no?

It is to me if only because, as one of those infinitesimals, I am free of the burden of hope. No duty to change the world or make a difference or mold the future. No requirements at all. Like a gamma ray I will have passed through this corner of the continuum without a trace. Whatever I have done or am doing or do, will be lost in the vastness of the universe. And yet...

In those instants when I tried to write a good phrase or put down the just right sequence of letters, in those so small moments I think I may actually have found something more consequential than impact. Namely...buoyancy. A kind of floating sensation that defies gravity, lifts the density. Maybe there were even enough of those moments to hint at some kind of mass. A new particle called the noton. It does not exist at all but still has a fancy opinion about itself.

Perhaps I will get up and work on those equations tomorrow.

4.

## THE LIST

Trying to understand how I came to this point, staring down the window I mean, I did some research. Why not? If you are not going to jump, you might as well surf the web. That is a lot more interesting, believe me.

Anyway, as it turns out, suicide is a big industry and there is plenty of stuff to read about it. For example: there are a lot of different types of suicide as outlined by Durkheim, Baechler, others. Lots of reasons to end it all and some good ones too. Here is a sampling:

#### The Escape.

An attempt to free oneself from an intolerable situation, from grief perhaps or pain, physical or psychic. This could even be seen as a form of punishment for not living the casual life one might have lived but didn't. The window here would be seen as an exit; it does not matter what is on the other side as long as it is not this. Makes sense.

#### The Lesson.

The murdering of the self to make someone else feel remorse. Or maybe to blackmail those who would abuse you by ignoring you. I like this one too. To fit into this category, you have to ask yourself...who do you want to find your body? If you have an answer to this, you may be trying to teach that someone a lesson. They will not learn it of course but at least you tried. And you won't know anyway, so nothing to fret about.

#### The Calling.

The killing of the self to attain a state valued higher than life. Or make the world a better place by your sacrifice. Here is where we find the fanatics, the seekers, the ones willing to trash all there is in

the search for a higher truth. All those immolating priests or the Kool Aid drinkers. The terrorists too. Nice momentum here, nice and nuts, except that they are usually willing to take others with them. That seems mean. Not for me at all.

The Release.

Ah, the fatalistic suicide! Here you live your life under extreme rules and high demands and failing them, lose the meaning for living. You feel that nothing has worked, nothing will, nothing can...so byebye and good riddance. I can readily relate to this one and its lovely cast of disgust.

Yet it also seems a tad too operatic to work for me. Which leaves one last one...

The Joke.

Hermann Hesse said that eternity is a mere moment, just long enough for a joke. In which case we have suicide as the trite punch line and, finally, something that really resonates. In my eye's mind, as I imagine the jump and pass by every floor on the way down, I can easily hear myself laughing like a ninny, uncontrollable tears of hilarity swooshing off my face from the wind.

This is comicide of the lowest order. Slapstick, blunt, exasperating, and funny as hell. A laughing matter, if only it was. And at every floor on the way down they can hear me bibbling through my tears...so far so good. So far. So. Good.

Ha.

5.

## NOYES

I vaguely recall from my studies that Sartre was into nausea.

Not as a hobby...I mean as a theory. Or perhaps an analogy. Or at least another book.

Nausea, that is, as the central feeling of the modern inauthentic man, detached from other people, embracing banality as a justification for living, finding truth in the empty gestures of an ideological world. Looking out there for meaning and finding only muck.

When I read that I searched my own soul but I could not find it anywhere. That feeling of nausea, I mean. Other, that is, than the intense need to throw up now and then.

No, I am different. The problem for me, as I see it, is not nausea. It is Noyes.

I don't mean the din or the drone or the dundundun in the head that signals a migraine. Or even the urge to scream at someone who simply refuses to stop jabbering. Those are problems too but the Noyes to which I refer is a much bigger problem. Deeper and far more persistent. Quite maddening. Like hemorrhoids.

Noyes.

This is my little shorthand for No and Yes. It is my obsession, my thing, my craving. Put Noyes and a thick piece of cheese at opposite ends of the maze and I have no idea which way I might scatter. By

Noyes I mean the pain of No and the fear of Yes...or is it the other aroundway? No or yes, spurned or embraced, rejected or respected. Reviled or admired. Ignored or noted.

(Note to self: continue this list for pages and pages when you have the time since, to someone suffering from Noyes, all of language is nothing but these drear dyads.)

You see what I mean? This everly urgent sense of how exactly I am being received. Good lad or bad. Dr. W, that shrinkster I saw for a while, once said that my feelings of self-worth had become dependent on my perception of other people's perception of my feelings of self-worth. Thanks very much for that goggle, doc, which sounds just about right.

It all has something to do with something called Ontological Insecurity. No innate sense of self and so the self searches for reasons to be, tracks them down in other people's reactions. Spoiler alert...it never finds them. Or actually, it finds them so often that one becomes nothing but a coaster on a roller, jolting up and down with the no and the yes and the no and yes.

I know this is a problem and so I tried to turn within, to meditate, to be myself for myself, to take responsibility...all of that self-help baloney and more. But no amount of probing and prodding could change it. It was an unstitchable rip. Like a hole in my esteem that all the yesses in the world could

never fill but all the nos could only widen. Rejection, disappointment, failure, or acceptance, success, fulfillment. It did not matter. Everything became two sides of a coin in a ditzzy spin.

It was quite absurd. My sense of myself based on what those other bozos said or thought or felt about the “me” that I had no idea who was. Or worse, all based on what I thought they said or thought, or felt, about what I thought I did or said.

Warning: when you get done with all that roiling language, the window is not even a choice anymore. Only the toilet bowl is.

I guess Sartre was right after all about nausea.

If I read him right.

Of course I’m not trying to live an authentic life or a good life or much of any life at all. I am simply trying to see if there is any reason on earth to stay on the shallow side of the window.

6.

## PITCH

I have been staring down to the street for a long time – years in fact – and by now, the window has become a kind of fetish, I admit. The doorway you dream about but never go through. The exitway, gateway, highway to nowhere. On and on. Rabbit hole. A self-depleting metaphor after all. Black hole.

So I tried to envision myself ignoring the window altogether. Leaping from the roof instead,



let's say. That worked for a while and there was even something liberating in that. After all, a roof is nothing but a roof; nothing to ponder your way through. No metaphysics or symbolism up there. Just roof.

It makes sense too.

Professors have studies; artists have studios; businessmen have offices. Thieves have cells and judges have chambers. But madmen have the sky. In a way, that is all we have.

So I got myself dressed and headed out and up with a new sense of mission. If I flung myself from the roof, could "flung" become a viral verb? My legacy!

But then, in the elevator to the roof of my building, I wondered and hesitated. The room with the window was private, intimate. No one would know I was there or no longer there. But here I was in the elevator and there are other people in the building. What would happen if I bumped into someone? A neighbor say, or a visitor. What would happen if I ran into a big Hollywood producer on the way up? Standing there smug and preeny, that tiny smile suggesting another deal gone well, another contract pipped.

Would I stand there and seethe and wallow, you know, about their life working out and mine not? Stand there benumbed? Or would I have the fortitude to speak...to pitch my book as a movie? After all, wouldn't success undermine the despair I felt and make the whole suicide gambit moot?

Moot Suicide. A fine name for a movie, and I made a note of that.

When you think about jumping, you are flatly admitting defeat but if they option your book you have to find a better excuse. And that could take years of negotiations, planning, scripting, casting. Even if the movie was a big flop, I could well be out of my depression by then.

Naturally, no one else got in. I even stopped at the twelfth floor to check. Nothing. But that gave me time and when I reached the top floor I had worked out my elevator pitch: the movie is about a man who jumps off a cliff and it goes downhill from there.

Heh.

No one is as clever as one who has everything to lose.

But when I finally arrived up top, I found that the door to the roof was locked anyway. Plus, it had an alarm warning in shockingly large letters. NO SUICIDES FROM THIS ROOF! Well, perhaps I only imagined that.

You know the rest. Not wanting to alarm anyone, I went back down and had a cup of tea and thought about who might star in the movie version...in Moot Suicide. I was thinking George Clooney but I knew it would much more likely be some complete unknown, some ham actor on the slab of his own melt. Harry Lindsay maybe. Ever hear of him?

Me either.

7.

## MADNESS

I have been wondering for a while if this depression is really some kind of madness.

That is starting to sound right. To resonate, as we say in the mental biz.

Maybe I should have called this the Journal of A Madman. Not an Adman (I did that for a spell) or a Badman (not for me to say) but a true lunatic. Madness with a capital M, slightly deformed of course.

It makes sense either way you take the word...as anger or insanity. Or both. Who else would even bother to write all this crap down and call it memorious?

Madness sounds sane to me if only because it is a further excuse to descend into myself. There is just something so self-inflating about it. This is the reason, I figure, that mad men rant in their padded cells. They have discarded all pretense of nicety, civility, sincerity. Instead they are spiraling down and down to the very core of the rage at the center of their disgust. Rage at what, disgust with whom? Who knows...maybe Freud. Or that idiot Dr. Kapinsky, another therapist, who listened to me for five years and barely had a word to say. Then promptly went out one day and killed himself.

Okay, Dr. K who is the mad man now?

In spite of all this, my own rantings - my own writings - often strike me as a kind of poetic

overindulgence. The way you can be overtaken by a romantic notion. Like a dream of tuberculosis that turns you into a philosopher or that woozy feeling you get just before regurgitating lies. Or that woman on the bus you saw and thought about all the time and how sweet she would feel and what you would say and do...just before she got off and never noticed you. The romance of the mad madness madly maddened.

But my point is that I began to think that this madness thing sounded just right. Maybe a kind of chemical anger or genetic derangement. An anger so wretched that it drives you madder than mad.

I had an uncle who was so pissed off he thought the government was trying to get to him through rays in the toilet. Is that what this is all about? Some sort of twisted DNA, dented neurons or some such thing, affecting the seething section of the brain, warping the mind and creating an eddy of...

But there I go again, swooning after something to foam over, wallowing in it actually.

But of course, this is all nothing compared to the world. Just the pale anger of a disappointed romantic. Romantic, you say? Yes, because I had dreams once, dreams of a workable life now as scattered as the ashes of a poisoned lover. All so very fancyschmancy, but meanwhile, outside that window of mine, the world is going madder than even me, and faster too. Police are shooting every black man in sight, terrorists blowing up malls all over, and they

are going to build a wall around the country to keep everyone out. The lies of politics, the manipulations of the news, the insanity of reality TV...what exactly is my little mad world compared to all that?

Of course, there is a solution, as any textbook on the subject will tell you. And I don't mean 25 mg of Zoloft, although I am not ruling that out.

No, the solution for anyone facing down the plummet in a red rage, as I now see it, is figuring out how to turn all of this wrath outwards. That is, how to get deeply pissed off rather than unhinged. Get mad not go mad, so to speak. Or maybe nomad at all but profoundly annoyed instead. Idea for a T-shirt: Madmen of the world unite...we have nothing to lose but our minds!

I could go on like this forever because it is a hell of a lot easier to wield weird words than to deal with real things. Easier and more fulfilling.

Too bad for you.

8.

## SUFFERING

I started the day today fairly combobulated.

But it all went dis from that point on.

Yes I stood at the window thinking about it but only as an idea, a concept, not with the feverish intensity that would propel me through it. It seemed

to me then like a choice, an option, rather than a fateful finale.

But the TV was on and something distracted me. It was an ad for an organization fighting world hunger, showing those terrible faces staring back at you, pleading for you to do something.

That upset me.

Not those poor people, heaven knows I am far too selfish to be seduced by that. No, just the idea of suffering itself. Here were people truly beaten by the cruel world and there was I in my warm room with a nice window and breakfast only a few steps away.

I was suffering too but it could not have been at all the same thing since mine was the result of an excess, not a deprivation.

Yes, an excess of self.

In my years of window watching, I had come not only to understand suffering but to esteem it. Treasure it. In fact, I came to think that suffering was one of the great inventions of humankind. Greater than the paper bag perhaps, because it can hold so much more. But it is not just me making this assessment. Sophocles thought it balanced sin. Aeschulus said that it led to wisdom. To Christ, it purified. And then there was Siddhartha, who said it was the nub of life itself.

Nub. That's a good word.

"Suffering is the origin of consciousness," Dostoevsky wrote. I think I know what he meant. If everything is hunky-dory, then there is nothing to do, nothing to think. The way life must appear for a

twig. Just what it is and no more. One damn thing after another, someone else said.

I'm no twig but I keep wondering of some twiggy would be so bad. Isn't that what I am searching for in those books on Zen. Mindful mindlessness? The nothing at the core of anything? Twig-mind?

I tried that for a while, thinking of nothing, least of all myself and my suffering. I tried to be the very best twig I could be. I even lay down on the floor and twisted myself into a twiggy form, stayed there for a while as a kind of yoga pose. Wu-sin, no mind. All twig.

It didn't work.

I kept going back to all those folks in the commercial. My obsession with myself about anger or depression or madness or whatever it was, suddenly seemed false and indulgent. I wanted to run from it, go to Africa, volunteer on the front lines, help one single other person. Obliterate myself, in other words, and all my smart suffering.

Couldn't do it, of course. I am in too deep. Too much invested maybe or maybe it is simply a genetic trap. No doubt my forebears suffered too...thought the world was cruel, not just to most everyone, but to them mostly. Which it is of course and was. Maybe this is all as evolutionary as my thumbs. To feel bad rather than find options, dwell rather than overcome, and not take no for an answer so fast that no one could even pose the question...all

that just etched into the nucleic acids. To suffer, in sum, as a kind of brilliant adaptation.

It is just that not everyone suffers from their suffering and not every sufferer is Dostoevsky.

And that of course is the whole story here in a nut's hell...I mean a nutshell.

9.

## **GUILT**

I thought today that they might come for me.

Finally.

On the street, when I go out to get eggs or pizza, I jump when I see police cars turn the corner. I assume they have me in their sights. A bad photo on the laptop in the car....but good enough to ID me. I can clearly see myself shoved against the wall, handcuffed as my neighbors watch coldly. And then in that room with the bad light answering snapping questions, explaining my case to a lawyer looking at her cell phone, then standing before the judge and hearing the sentence, the brutal eyes of the jury flailing me.

On the street, the cop car passes by, no interest in me at all, but by then I have broken out into an itchy sweat and forgotten where I was going in the first place.

Sometimes I feel that I should turn myself in and confess.



I know, as no one else can after all, that I am guilty as charged. Immersed in all those shoulds and wallowing in the oughts. Even if I am not guilty as charged, I am surely charged with guilt and, in the world of infomercials and self-help books at least, that is enough to condemn me.

For example: I know I should be avoiding carbs, fat, sugar, dairy, gluten, fast food, junk food, chocolate, salt, meat, toxic individuals and a bunch of other things I cannot recall but have on a list somewhere. I should be going for that colonoscopy, the stress test, a PSA test, a full skin evaluation, a regular check-up, blood work, and another eye exam but instead I stare out the window and imagine how nice it would be to be dead for a change.

That's Dylan Thomas, not me, by the way.

You see? I can't even come up with a snarky line without risking arrest.

The other day, I did make an appointment but the ads on the bus as I was heading over there reminded me that I should be doing so much more to lose weight, fix that nose, change shampoos, make a difference, be the best me, treat today as the first day of the rest of my life...

I really need to get back to the gym.

In my mind's eye, when I happen to have such a moment, I can just barely imagine myself as the better me. Sure I can. Holding forth on my passions by hosting marvelous dinner parties and fun picnics, seeing friends for lunch and being clever company, having long and hilarious yet deep telephone

conversations. I should learn a language or two, play an instrument or two, master some new app. Volunteering, joining a chorus, inventing the next must-have doohickey. I should, in other words, be doing something more, much more, than standing at the window and dreaming of nothingness as a kind of career move.

Is that why I feel the need to surrender to the authorities? Because I have not become the person I thought myself to be? Because I have broken the law of oomph, here in America of all places, the grand cathedral to the upbeat?

I am a Jew, after all, and therefore genetically prepped for a life of guilt...and thank my lucky genes for that! But this feeling goes beyond mere shtick. This is some kind of uberguilt, guilt beyond guilt. Existential and phenomenological. Filled to the brim with empty dreams. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I stand before you today less a man than an innocent container...

But it seems to me that I have said all this before, written it before. In fact, I am sure of it. This whole journal is a paean to the same insight over and over again, striking and dull. Like someone banging a pan in an orbiting parade, one more thump in an endless callithump.

The cops turn the corner again and once again, I cringe. With dread. With hope.

I would not risk this arrest one more time by going out except that I still need the eggs.

10.

## LEAP

Last night I awoke from a dream and went right to the window.

It was a silly dream about losing my ticket, missing my flight and being stuck in the airport for days and days. Yet somehow when I got out of bed, the intensity of my despair was so deep that I immediately thought I might have the courage to...well, you know.

Obviously I was wrong.

Lost, missing, and stuck...you don't need years at an Institute to figure that dream out. In fact, the dream was so obvious, so utterly devoid of intricacy and wit that it actually made me laugh.

In the morning, this morning, I had the idea to write a book called *The Pessimist's Guide to a Giddy Life*. You have to be a committed pessimist to see how truly hilarious this impossible world is.

For me, the glass is not half full or half empty at all...it is clearly in shards on the floor that you will inevitably step on. Funny right? Not to mention recoiling from the stagger and bashing your nose on the closet door.

Loonier and loonier.

It must be this way because of our awareness of time, our suspicions of a past and the hints of a future.

Think about it...worms worm, birds go birding, rats rat around but we are the ones who contemplate

the past and future. We are the ones with visions of the origin and end, storytales of what was and what will be, vast constructions of the way things go.

But the actual fact is that they just go, with or without us and our fancy fantasies.

At the window in the night, there happened to be a very bright star, or perhaps Jupiter, which distracted me. It was really quite beautiful, rising over one of the velvet apartment buildings, glittering in a deep dark blue sky.

I watched it intently for a while wondering if it meant something one way or the other. But of course it did not because, after all, it was just a star and not some grand truth. It was born and will die, just like us. It goes through its cycles of zest and rest, just as we do. Bright tonight, blank as a hole in the memory some other time.

Just like us, it is a slave to time but at least we can fill this instant with our stories. The star, no doubt, just floats in space with no notion at all of lovers making wishes beneath it or dogs howling at it or poets waxing and waning about it.

We are the ones, the starmakers, who turn it into a big deal and think, as I did in that moment, that the star is saying something to me about leaping.

But then, I thought, if the star is just the star and not an omen, then so too is the window just a window and not a seductress. The plummeting jump, the bloody corpse, the cold concrete street, the

troubled thoughts, the brave decision in the dark of the night...all just moments in the passing vastery, with little meaning and barely any heft.

And in any case, there is nothing out there or at least nothing knowable beyond what we concoct. Just things in themselves that are all beyond our perception. In a word, Kant. We are the ones who bring meaning and destiny and gods - and suicide - to the oblivious universe. The obliverse!

Yet somehow, standing there grim and grand, all this struck me as intensely funny. I don't mean vaguely amusing in a philosophic sort of way. I mean truly bellyshaking and brainquaking fun fun funny.

Absurd in other words.

Camus said that suicide might be a logical response to the absurdity of life. My leap of gloom, for example. But he rejected it in the end because although it put you out of your own misery, it was no solution to the problem. It simply added to the absurdity itself.

So what other choice is there?

Transcendence perhaps. A firm belief in the beyond - religious, spiritual, or even abstract - that gives this reality meaning. A leap of faith you might say. But Camus thought of this as a kind of philosophical suicide.

You can see where this is going.

It is going towards the only logical response to the utter absurdity of existence...acceptance. The understanding that what is is what it is, and so we

live our lives. A leap in place, so to speak, a coy pirouette.

Camus said that if we accept the absurd, we can achieve a kind of freedom from it. It is a swift judo move in which we use the weight of absurdity against itself to triumph over it. Pretty cool stuff.

Sadly, I cannot figure that one out for myself and I suspect that Camus was a secret optimist, not just thinking about an absurd universe, but smoking French cigarettes and planning his next book.

Well, let me tell you that by the time I was finished with all that - with airports and windows and Camus and fate and absurdity in my head - I was actually feeling a bit silly. Like when you have too much wine too fast. I mean, there is no star and there is no me and there is nothing to be or do and yet there must be the me that I was as I was staring at the star and being and doing something about it by thinking.

Hilarious. I laughed so long and hard at this laughable condition that I ran out of the impetus to jump.

But I did remember a nice quote from the writer Giacomo Leopardi. He said: "He who has the courage to laugh is master of the world, much like him who is prepared to die".

An interesting connection.

11.

## HELP

I know what you are thinking and the answer is yes. Of course I have been in therapy. Many times.

Really.

The problem is that it seemed to do more for the therapist than for me. It gave the shrink a chance to crack wise, to feel superior, to stand back and evaluate...and to put a little do-re-mi in the pocket. I, on the other hand, dragged myself in week after week, whined and dunned for fifty minutes, then slouched out.

I think in the end they all thought I was fairly hopelessly self-absorbed and would never overcome my issues.

*Moi* self-absorbed? Just because I spend most of the day obsessing about myself?

Ridiculous.

I first saw Dr. K when I was sixteen years old because I used to worry all the time and had no idea why. I spent about five years in his office spilling my guts while also trying to wipe them up from the floor. I talked about my mom and how worried she was about me and how I worried about her worrying. I told him just what it was like to be a teen, how much I wanted to fit in and also stand out. I explained carefully how much I wanted to get laid. I told him about the jitters and how nothing ever seemed to actually trigger it. Just an overwhelming

sense of threat. My father had died by then. Could that have something to do with it?

Dr. K had not much to say about all that. But he said not much in a profoundly loud *soto voce*. Maybe because it was talk therapy not chat therapy. Me talk, he listen. Or maybe because he was an idiot with a degree but no insight. I never really knew. He would occasionally break into my narration and ask me questions like “how did that make you feel” and “do you see the connection to your relationship to your mother?” Miserable and yes were my answers for pretty much everything the whole time.

More than anything, I admired his skill in being able to sit back and not have to struggle with life like I did. I even thought that some day, when I was cured of my personality that is, I might become a shrink myself. Sit in an office and listen to other people’s troubles. Did you actually have to help them to get paid? I did not think so and Dr. K was doing all right on that score.

Imagine my surprise when I read about his suicide in the local paper. He had taken an overdose of something or other in his apartment. And not even a note to thank me for keeping him awake for all that time although there is also a chance that I drove him to it with my relentless sniveling.

In my dreams, Dr. K is never on the floor of his apartment, by the way. Instead, he is always sitting there, expressionless and quiet, with the overhead lights bouncing off his eyeglasses and those neat



shoes neatly aligned. He says nothing in my dreams and soon enough I find myself racing down a strange street screaming and searching for a taxi I never find.

Eventually the therapy ended, no doubt because I left my teens behind, and memories of my father too, and one day moved out of my mother's apartment and had my own life. You know, grew the fuck up.

FYI...I studied psychology in college and graduate school but I never became a shrink. A good thing too. If I had to spend my career listening to the pathetic babblings of some jackass like myself, I would not be fixating on a window. I would long ago have found out what Dr. K used to escape the madness and taken a double dose of it myself.

I guess therapy worked in that way at least.

12.

## LOVERS

I made a list of lovers today.

Why? No good reason.

It was something to do instead of brooding I suppose. Or maybe I figured that such a thing would be some kind of find for whoever finds this kind of thing. A legacy maybe or a eulogy. Proof that I had lust in the soul rather than just dust there.

Or I may have made the list just to prove that I actually lived once.

It turns out that I had intercourse with 15 women, some kind of sex with 18 more, and beyond that was in love with 31 women even if only for a few minutes of unrequited desire. In other words, my heart swelled 64 times and my sausage only about 33.

Swell...but is all that worth a mention?

Not in the history books or the annals of sex, given Casanova and Hugh Hefner and Wilt Chamberlain. But in a teeny way, it is worth a note because that was me back there, after all, loving or fucking or yearning. Actually living, that is to say, and not just grousing about it.

The most amazing thing about this little endeavor was that I could remember all their names and where we were and when. I could recall the faces, the bodies, the smells. Texture of the soft skin on the shoulder, feeling of the silky hair against my face. Pressure of that clammy hand on my cock. I easily remembered my own feelings too. The guilty intensity of touching M down there in that closet. The dizzy pleasure of playing with D's rounded breasts under her shirt. The mysterious allure of exploring that cute valley on G's lower back. Getting lost in L's billowy lips like an aviator in the clouds.

Like snapshots lost and found in a hoard no one even knew was there, I instantly recalled them all. I guess they mattered to me even if in the end, and maybe even at the start, I was nothing to them more than a passing wisp with a hard-on.

It was sad in a jolly sort of way. All those connections made and lost. And I imagined myself calling one of them up all these years and masturbations later. Sorry, I meant all these machinations later.

Do you remember me? Do you remember that chilly night in November? Do you recall the way I felt inside of you? That time we came together? What we whispered or did not even utter? Did it mean anything to you? Do you ever think back on it with warm nostalgia? Ever think of it at all? Of me?

I wondered if we shared something or if it was all just an invention in my feverish brain. I even looked some of them up online, found a few. But of course I never tried to contact a single one of them.

I suspect I know the answers.

Overall, I cannot say that I felt too sanguine about the whole business. Not that there is anything wrong with thinking back or making lists or recalling. The problem for me is that it is all bathed in the light of regret.

*Je regrette tout*, as some French guy said. In fact, regret is the *plein air* that I breathe, a *raison d'être*. *C'est moi*, and so on. Sorry about all that lingua but somehow when you start down this rue, it always seems to lead to Páree. And not the City of Light but Paris during the occupation, when the cafes played the melancholy music of lost lives and loves. When silk stockings stayed torn and poets turned out coded reports for the underground. Cigar smoke lingered like sad hopes drifting...

But I digress.  
Or do I?

13.

## WEDLOCK

I was married once.  
Do you find that surprising?

I sure as hell do. In fact it shocks the shit out of me every time I remember it. To understand it, you have to go back to a time when I lived an ordinary life. House, job, wife...the x, y, z's of existence. So let us call her Y and leave it at that.

Y?

Good question.

I think it may have been because she was uninteresting enough to be interested in me. I had seen her at a party at a friend's house. She looked sad in some way and maybe that is what appealed to me most. Besides the boobs, that is. Boobs and sadness, I was obsessed with both of them and Y did not disappoint. When I first played with them, her nipples got huge right away and I thought she might burst into tears. Can you imagine what a turn-on that was for me?

We did not have much in common actually, except perhaps for low expectations. Is that why we got married? I don't even remember anymore. It was fun for a while, having someone else right there, not having to look around, setting up house. But

after a few years, once we had explored all there was to discover about each other, we started to drift apart. Or fight. About what? About anything. She forget to do the dishes, I neglected to make the bed. We had pillows on the couch and argued about how to place them. I became so lonely inside the wedlock that I thought about fooling around which is, of course, how I met L.

I even started to see a shrink again. This time it was a woman whom, I presumed, could give me a better insight about my relationship. I will call her Dr. C here because she kept saying that. "See what I mean, see what I am saying, see how this works?" She had a lot of advice, which helped in the sense that I began to think there might be solutions to the problems I had. Better ones than fucking around, I mean. Dr. C though that might be a bad idea and told me so and why.

Of course I did not listen to her. Instead I began to find L utterly fascinating. She was not of course. And alluring, which is to say I overlooked the gap in the tooth and the spread of the hip. More than wanting her, I needed her. As a distraction maybe, or perhaps a curative.

Soon enough the marriage ended - the infidelity was just a pip at the conclusion of the sentence - and I was on my own again. Now that I think of it, Dr. C was wrong. It had not been a bad idea at all.

14.

## MONSTERS

Today I thought about that famous quote again. I have got quite a few drifting around in my head, but this was the one about morbid symptoms. It was written by Antonio Gramsci and it made perfect sense to me:

“The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”

He was probably referring to political change but I took it personally. I repeated it often to myself, finding comfort in its sense of transition rather than entrapment. And in the notion that misery might be an intermission between acts. Or the idea that evolution can overcome depression.

Then I read that maybe he wrote that and maybe he did not. You know how these things work. Maybe it was, as someone else wrote, simply a rotten transcription from a loose French translation by Gustave Massiah that actually read:

“Le vieux monde se meurt, le nouveau monde tarde à apparaître et dans ce clair-obscur surgissent les monsters.”

That was even better in some ways. The old world is dying, the new world slow to emerge and in this time of brights and shadows, monsters arise.

Monsters. I know all about monsters.

Or even better, demons.

*Demon est deus inversus...*a demon is an inverted god.

I liked that and took it to heart because I could see how a flipped god in my psyche had become my demon. That god being the kid who cared. You know, that frightened and enraged and worried kid with a great horrific imagination, who cared so damn much about everything.

In other words, the kid was dying and the adult was not yet born and in this interregnum...

But the problem was that I seemed to be living my entire life in the transition, the interregnum, never quite getting to the new world.

I was like an addict for all those years, hoping for a cure and never finding one. And like all addicts, I was not addicted to a thing or a substance. I was addicted to a reeling in the brain, a stir of neurochemicals that made me feel good. I never got that from drugs or booze or even sex. Instead, I got it from an obsession with my own needs. I was addicted to that great and grand and all-consuming high of all highs...myself in the world.

All the therapy, all the writing, all the thinking...they accomplished nothing but to heat the pot by which I mean the stew in the brain that was cooking. Dawn to dusk, teen to adult, all I ever seemed to care about was my sense of my own self. The monster was in the mirror and the mirror was the world. I actually covered all the mirrors in the apartment for a while to avoid it but all that did was make me feel gloomy.

So of monsters and mirrors, I have little else to say. Except perhaps that there is immense comfort in knowing that no one will ever actually paw through any of this mud that I have written.

The journal will sit on my shelf, a silent testament to that endless moment in between the last gasp of the old and the first screech of the new.

A symptom of itself and nothing more.

15.

## MUDITA

Apparently, P. is on the short list.

Not the shit list, which happens also to be the case, but the esteemed and wonderful Short List. For the National Book Award I mean.

When he told me he was on that list, I wanted to laugh. No, I *did* laugh. Laughed because it was so ludicrous. Ludicrous because he could not write for beans, could not graffiti his way out of a bathroom stall, could not...well, you get the gist. I did not express this; I was restrained but polite and I think he bought it. At least I think he did not hear me flushing frantically inside the privy of my own mind in order to get rid of the pile of crap he put there.

I said hoo-hoo and ta-ta and got off the phone. But in fact it bothered me all week.

How unfair! Here I was with all my literary investments and there he was with all the payouts. It struck me then that the world is composed of whiners and winners, yearnings and earnings, teasers



and takers...oh believe me I can go on and on when it suits me.

I wanted to get over it, really did. Wanted to get over the rage swelling in my gut. I wanted to be magnanimous, generous. Write him a note that left out the word puke. But I could not do it. I could not seem to find the right mix of niceties in my brainsoup.

I know how bad this sounds. No, how bad it actually is.

Believe me, I know all about *mudita*, although I must say that the focus for me has always been on the *mud* part. Mudita, if you don't know, is the third of the brahmaviharas, the teachings on love.

The first is metta, which means to accept what is. The second is karuna, to embrace life. And then we have mudita...to find joy.

It means to be able to be pleased, to have a sense of gladness, delight...even and especially in the success of others. This is the antidote to envy, which as you may have guessed, consumes me like a green flame.

Mudita means having no judgment, not of yourself, not of anyone else. Accepting your life, another life, and wishing both the best of luck. Joy is joy is joy, whether you feel it for your own life or another.

I get that, I really do. I know that if I compare myself to others, then I am looking to them to define me and that is a bad idea.

Under the theory that if you act as if you have a great heart, a great heart may come to you (from some movie probably), I waited a whole week for my envy to dissolve. Mostly because I had other tortures to attend to, but that is a different matter. And then, refreshed, I returned to my emails with a renewed sense of acceptance, embracement, joyfulness. I would compose that email and tell P. just how happy I was for him. Yes, I could do that, I told myself. I could get over my rage of jealousy, even I!

I sat down at the computer, full of a new sense of mudita. And then of course, by the iron rules of aggravation which are greater than all others....the inevitable happened. P., that scribbling jackass, that pisher into the latrine of literature, actually won the goddamn award! And for that crap memoir...can you believe it?

I can.

You have no idea how swell I feel for his success.

16.

## TEETH

Last night I stopped myself, for the umpteenth time.

Not for any deep reason....it just so happened.

What just so happened was 10:00pm. That is the time that I usually, by which I mean always, brush my teeth. I was lying in bed, staring at the window, thinking about my approach, those dire few

steps, and then the slow but firm raising of the window, the cold air sweeping in, all of it.

But I glanced at the clock then and saw the time. Ten on the dot.

On an average day I would get off the bed and walk into the bathroom. Load the brush, go through the routine of ten strokes in each quadrant, ten, ten, ten, ten...

But this was different because at that precise moment I was thinking about jumping and that was when the question emerged in my mind that stopped me. A simple question, dumb question. But those are usually the best questions and somehow the answer interrupted the whole rigamarole.

The question was....should I brush my teeth first?

It sounds moronic, I know, but at the time it seemed profound and pertinent.

On the one hand, we have the obvious. What could possibly be the benefit? If my fantasies turned real, they would find me a sloppy mass of shredded tissue, crushed bone, and pools of goopy blood down in the alleyway behind my building. Who could possibly care if my teeth were clean? A mortuarial dentist?

On the other hand, to do it - to brush my teeth first - struck me as some kind of act of defiance in a strange way.

To not simply succumb to the forces propelling me, but to make my stand as a man, a human being, a real person. I would brush my teeth and then end my life. My terms, my time. Something on the

order of the last cigarette before the blindfold, the sip of brandy before the ship went down. One last savoring of living before oblivion.

It is not that I care so much about my teeth; just that at that moment this little act of rebellion seemed to matter more than anything else.

My teeth were me, after all, and if I ended my life, I ended theirs too. They had been there from the start, well almost, and through all the failed loves and broken dreams.

I even once tried to name them all. I did. I came up with a scheme to name them after the monarchs of England starting with Ethelred through the Jameses and the Williams and the Henrys. Got as far as Charles II with my lower right molar. But that one had to be pulled a few years ago and now there was only a power vacuum...

What can I say? If you have been reading this journal, if you know me at all by now, you can sniff the outcome from miles away. Did I brush my teeth before jumping or not?

I did neither.

I could not make up my mind and therefore chose not to. I even convinced myself that this very indecision was another act of defiance.

So instead, I got up and wrote this all down.

Not saying it was a better use of the time but at least it was something.

17.

## MOON

At night, on the right night, I can lie in bed and look out of that whispering window and see the moon.

Last night it was full once again...a big round glowing hole in the deep dark casting shadows like echoes of forgotten dreams on the floor. I could almost feel the warmth of the glow on my face lying there knowing that if I was not there to almost feel it, it would not *be* at all.

The moon that is.

Without me, there is no moon. Without us, humans being that is, there is no moon.

The moon is our concoction.

I know what you are thinking...more blither from a blithering blatherer. Or something like that. But either way you would be wrong. Think about this. If we humans did not exist, the moon would not exist either.

Oh there would be stuff of course, matter or whatever there is, bumping this way and that and energies whipping all about. But the moon! That thing in the sky with a face and a name and a biography of phases....that would not be.

The moon is only the moon - my moon, yours, Galileo's, Neil Armstrong's - because we conceive of it that way and without that there would be something or other...but certainly not THE MOON.

And if not the moon, then nothing else either because the whole shebang works this way....moon, sun, star, galaxy, universe.

Nothing is but what we make it. Without us, there is just stuff and that is why there is no moon unless someone like me makes something of it. And once I am gone, there is no moon no more nohow. Someone else will have to conjure it.

On the other hand, I recalled reading that the value of alpha is .0072973525698, not one pip more or less. I read that when I thought that science might give me hope. The number has something to do with the strength of electromagnetism - don't ask me - but the simple fact is that it is what it is. That precise number. Exactly.

I peered into that number for days looking for reasons, connections. I saw the jamesbond at the start of it, the prime in the middle, even my old phone number in Flatbush at the end. None of it came to anything for the simple reason that the universe is just what it is no matter what we think or, more properly, because of what we think.

It was this number and this universe that led to us, to people with pencils and inklings, people with nothing better to do than think about that number and the moon and this universe and by thinking about it, construct it.

All of it.

Even alpha down to its niggling decimal.

So the universe creates us and we turn around and then recreate it.

Swell, I thought. But where does that leave me? Is it worth living just to make a universe or better dying just to be part of it? No clue about that. But then I remembered something else and tested it. I reached out my hand with my thumb pointing straight up. Sure enough, it was true. No matter how huge the moon looms in the sky, you can completely cover it with your thumb at the end of an extended arm.

Blot it out with your thumb.

That meant something too although to be honest I had no idea what and went back to sleep.

18.

## PESSIMISM

My cousin J. called to check in on me.

If she hasn't heard from me in a few months, she worries she said. I tried to be nice, asked her about the tot, the job, the trip to Pasadena. But I suspect that a certain futility crept into my voice. It usually does once I run out of questions.

She said I was being pessimistic when I said that everything would end badly. Eventually, as always, she asked if I was okay. I think my yes was less than convincing, so she suggested a book with a title like *Get Off Your No and Live a Yes Life*. Or maybe it was *The Brighter Side Is Your Side*.

Or something else.

Either that or see a shrink and get on Prozac.

J. is a nice kid to call me like that, but she could not possibly understand. She has the infection and is sniffing with affluenza, choking on consumption, burning up with getting and having. She has bought into the dream and thinks that as long as the microwave works things are fine.

But it is more than that too. Purists like J. think that everything that happens happens for a good reason. The reason, in her case, not God but fate, karma, the exclamation point at the end of time. Not to mention Hegel and the whole “best of all worlds” thing.

What she does not get is that my situation is not a condition, it is an attitude. What I am talking about is the great and only pessimistic project. The pointlessness of all the points, the burden of time, the ironic impendium, the fib that is happiness, and the absurdity of being.

This is all wonderful stuff, like candy to a master sullenizer like myself. After all, I am the one who scored zero on the Beck Depression Inventory and had my score thrown in the trash on the Beck Hopelessness Scale. And who the hell was Beck anyway to judge me?

What they, the upbeaters and the go-getters, do not seem to understand is that pessimism is not unhappiness. And it certainly is not depression, although I have that too in spades. Depression feels like a sensation of great weight. A black hole from which no mass or light escapes. Nor gravity nor



levity or any other thing that moves. It is negative and negating and all sorts of other neggy stuff. A hole in the hope that is nothing less than being itself. It was my weight for a long time.

Pessimism, on the other hand, was the cure.

Pessimism is an attitude of freedom. It is positive, a search for meaning in an indifferent universe. Without magic to pull us out, or some deity to carry us away, or progress to build a ladder, there would be no possibility back here in the hole. But pessimism tells us that possibility and hope and the bright side are all illusions.

I am not alone in this of course. There are plenty of philosophers who saw it this way.

For example, I started to read Spengler's *The Decline of the West* thinking it would comfort me. After all, if modern Western civilization is in its wintry age of decline, then why should I worry? But it is a long book and filled with dense clauses, exhausting in other words, a huge effort, and it did not get me any closer to actually *doing* anything.

So here I sit, regretting the past, dreading the future. Yearning to jump yet terrified of the fall. And overall, like a dank blanket, with that heavy understanding that no one and no thing, not Zeus or time or history or even the owl at the center of the universe knows or gives a hoot about my struggle with this. Just J.

I may just call her back.

19.

## MUSICAL PROBLEM

“Sickness is a musical problem,” Dr. C once fluted. “Every cure is a musical solution.”

I think she was trying to be cute or maybe she read an article somewhere. Or perhaps she was just trying to weasel her way into the memoir I told her I was writing. But I would have none of it.

“So you say,” I harummphed.

“No. So Novalis say,” she countered. “You see what I mean?”

“Not at all.

“We all live by the music within us...the scales of our experience, the melodies of our lives, the notes of our choices.”

“I suspect mine is a jingle not the opera I imagine.”

“So, in a sense, if these things are not working we could say someone is a bit out of tune.”

“Is this psychology or stand-up you’re talking?”

“Play along with me here.”

“I’m all ears.”

“I would say that you are stuck in some sort of fugue. In music that’s a good thing...repetition of a pleasing pattern. But psychologically, it’s a problem. You lose your own true identity.”

“What pattern am I stuck in?”

“That voice in your head that keeps telling you what a flubber you are, for example.”

“But it’s true.”

“You need to hum a different tune. My *Way* perhaps. Or *I Can Do That* from Chorus Line.

Just to indulge her, I tried humming a few bars from each of them. I am able to carry a tune after all. Yet it all sounded so sad to me, like an oboe in the desert. Sulky, as a matter of fact.

“No, you’re being too rigid about all this. You refuse to give up on giving up on yourself. You need to practice. You need a musical mantra to guide you. Do you know *C’est Moi* from Camelot?”

“One blow and *au revoir!*” I belted.

“Good. I want you to sing that every day for the next week. But jazz it up. Take some chances. Hit a few new grace notes.”

I really did try to do what she suggested. Despite myself, I did want to get out of my depression and heaven knows the Elavil wasn’t helping much. So for a week I stood at the window, that window, my exit window, and belted out Lancelot’s song. It actually worked for a while in the sense that the whole thing seemed so ridiculous.

But in the end, momentum overcame melody. The songs began to get darker. I switched from sappy to sad, and from show tunes to dirges. By the time I saw her again I was singing *The Future*. Do you know it? It’s Leonard Cohen.

“I’ve seen the future, brother: it is murder.”

20.

## NOTHING

All this fretting and fussing.

And about what? Anything. Yet the simple fact of the matter is that there isn't anything there. Not a damn thing. Nothing in fact. Just vibrations. Jittering strings, they say, or the infinite void. The infundibulus, you name it.

All there is, there is, of course. I cannot deny that. It is just that all of it amounts to absolutely nothing at all. Just some sad graffiti that was never scratched inside an empty vault that was never opened.

I know exactly what you are thinking. You're thinking that nothing is just everywhere where something isn't. And that even everywhere where something isn't, is still filled to the brim with stuff.

You say even a little dollop of so-called nothing has quantum particles bursting in and out of existence, gamma rays, not to mention the Casimir force that results from the energy of all those particles and how that is enough energy to move a quantum mountain.

And then you will mention all the dark energy that they say is powering the expansion of the universe, so much that it overwhelms the totality of all gravity. If you have had enough to drink, you might even dredge up the old Higgs field, which is what gives matter its mass. And on and on.

And let us not forget, you will inform me in your wavering stupor, the seven other unfelt dimensions of the cosmos all infolded into that dollop.

I could go on and on.

The alternate universes for example.

Oh sure, nothing! you'll pishtosh. There is no nothing in nothing, my friend. I am sorry, you sigh, but you won't be able to find your peace of mind there. Blah blah blah.

Have it your way. But I simply say that all that you have done is fill the nothing there is with more ideas and thoughts, which are themselves, of course, nothing at all. As airy as wavicles in the ether. The "world is my idea" and all that Schopenhauerean stuff. Outside of that, nothing is still nothing. But by now, of course, you cannot hear me because you are passed out on the couch dreaming of little nothings as though they meant something.

How sweet and sad.

Well, I say to myself as I cover you with a nice blanky, I guess I am lucky in one way because I find comfort in nothing.

No thing, emptiness, the great and grand void...it is all disarmingly snuzzly to me in some odd way. It somehow means that all my failures, my losses and sorrows, are nothing but emptiness made visible for a brief instant just before they vanish into the vacuum. Particles that blip in time.

How lovely that strikes me.

21.

## OPTIMISM

I had lunch with B. today and once again he said that he is an optimist.

As usual I pointed out all the horrors that are happening and the hopelessness of hope and all that, but he refused to budge. He still used the word, in the same way that a badge is used to end a domestic dispute.

When I got home, I looked it up and found that the root of the word comes from the Latin for *optimum* and that the more precise definition of optimism is "the doctrine that this world is the best of all possible worlds."

You don't say?

The Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl wrote a famous book in the days after he was freed from a concentration camp in 1945. *Trotzdem Jazum Lebensagen*. The title means "yes to life despite everything." He notes that everything can be taken from a person except one basic human freedom: the right to choose one's own attitude in any given set of circumstances. In other words, if you choose to find it, there is hope even in the darkest pit of despair. Optimism is not a particular view of reality; it is an attitude about reality.

Geez, I thought...and without sarcasm.

Here is this dude who survived Dachau and lost everyone he ever loved and still lived to be positive and productive to the age of 92.

Which leads me to a simple and obvious question....what the fuck am I complaining about?

But hard as I try, optimism seems beyond my reach. Must be something to do with a particular mutation down there on a very specific gene. Adenine and guanine all bobbed up on one of the strands. And yet, thinking about all this, I had a kind of breakthrough. I invented something today. Something quite useful. And since it is made only from the shards of damaged dreams, it is quite cheap. It is an attitude that you can carry in your pocket. No batteries to fail; nothing to jam. My answer to optimism.

You know what *shadenfreude* is, right? Feeling good about someone else's misfortune.

Well this is a new kind of reverse *shadenfreude*. I have invented the idea of feeling good about my own misfortunes. I would call it *sichschadenfreude*... but I don't speak German.

So maybe I can just name it the Failgood device. You crank it up whenever you descend into self-pity and obsess about your own failures. In a few minutes, low and behold, a sense of pride and giddy good grace overcomes you.

Failgood in action: am I a complete and utter waste of protoplasm? Of course I am and so be it! Somebody has to take on the mantle. Somebody has to represent the least so that others can be the most, at least in comparison.

I have been using the device for a few days now and it works pretty well. Been feeling psyched about

everything. Positive you might say, assuming by that you mean anguished.

Hey, maybe I should have called this journal *The Joy of Despair*.

Is it too late to change the title?

22.

## REGRETS

I made a list of things to eat today: crow, my hat, shit, my words.

I did the best I could with it but I still managed to go to bed hungry.

Heh.

What I had in mind were all the mistakes that I made in my life but I soon ran out of space. The fact is that it may all have been one big mistake, all the way back to the boomboom that made me. Why could that have not been between some handsome billionaire and a sexy princess whose only wish was to make life easy for their only son? Instead, my own dad died when I was ten and left me...not with nothing exactly, but surely with a keen sense of nothing. He had nothing to say about being a man, no advice on women, no legacy to help me. A useless fellow, to me at least, who nailed my mom back when she was still a babe.

But that sounds petty, even to me, because I made plenty of other mistakes on my own from that point on. I spent my life as a kind of repo-man of bad decisions. Should have quit college and taken



that job; should have never gotten married too soon, invested in IBM, fucked the woman from the diner, and on and on and on.

Today I came up with a new alter ego for myself and I thought to call him Zeroman. Gray tights and cape and a big O on the chest. He doesn't do anything except sit around on his butt all day in a too tight suit wondering how things went so wrong.

See, it is all a matter of cruxions.

Good word that.

Cruxions are like strange attractors in chaos theory or the miniscule tuft that begins a dustball. You know, those teensy moments that have a grand impact, like a speck of goo in the colon. Sorry about that. A cruxion is a moment when you make a decision to do one thing rather than another. And the difference matters. Turn left, go to college, study genetics, find the cure for Hydra Fever. Turn right, get flattened by a bus. See?

My cruxions were not so melodramatic. I went to college but only ended up as an ad writer. I was never run over by a bus, but I came close a few times.

What I did manage to do was make the same mistakes over and over. That was my approach to the cruxions. If it was selfish, self-serving, and short-sighted...that was for me. The big picture, the long range plan, the service to others...not interested. And, for your information, I never seemed to learn from those mistakes.

That marriage I told you about was a disaster. By the time she left I was ready to forget the whole

relationship thing. Not worth it; bad idea; waste of time. So what did I do? I went right out and got into another relationship. Then another. Then another.

Remember the famous Santayana quote? Yes well he was wrong. Santayana had it backwards. It is not that those who don't remember the past are condemned to repeat it. The problem is that those who repeat the past are condemned to forget it. And make the same mistakes again.

But maybe all this is just more narcissism.

Duh.

Or maybe I am giving myself a bad rap. Maybe hindsight is blindy-blindy. Maybe my cruxions were all lined up. Maybe - just maybe - I made exactly the right decisions just as though I had been able to see the whole thing ahead of time and knew exactly what to do to make it come out as it was supposed to come out.

By which I mean maximum mistaking.

Not bad for someone born without an endowment.

23.

## DOCTOR M

I won an auction sometime back. One of the few things I have ever actually won. Not even sure why I signed up but I ended up winning anyway. A crack in the egg of fate!

The prize was a session with a certain Dr. M who was sure he could cure depression in a single

visit. So I went down to his office at the appointed time. What did I have to lose?

The ever upbeat Dr. M was one of those peppy mid-Western shrinks, not an ounce of angst in him. He was a descendant of Ford not Freud, the ego as industrial product, the psyche as manufactured goods. He lived in a shiny mentality where positive thinking met behavior modification. He wrote a book about it called *Say No to No*.

I had my opinions about all that. To me he was nothing more than a crackpot inventor sitting on a pile of cracked pots, namely, the chapters in his book. He might just as well have concocted a dark matter engine that did not light up, or a quantum foam toy that did not bubble. I read the book and knew instantly that the therapy would be of no use whatsoever because he never mentioned suffering. But hey, at least he wrote a book.

So I went and told him about the suicidal thoughts, my despairs and regrets, all my other therapies and so on.

“Regrets?” he asked jauntily. “How can you have regrets when you never had grets in the first place?”

“Very funny.”

“So we can eliminate all that from your user’s manual.”

“Just because you made a joke?”

“Because you see how silly they are. No longer needed.”

“Yes but...”

“And despairs? Just turn them in repairs! You follow me?”

“Aren't you supposed to be shrinking me out?”

“I don't follow.”

“You know. Ask me to talk about my life, my deep feelings, my secret desires and all that. My mom.”

“Your mom?”

“You know...shrink stuff.”

“That's all so twentieth.”

“Twentieth what?”

“Century. This is something new. Similar to putting a golf ball in a microwave, if thoughts were a golf ball. You follow me?”

“Not at all.”

“Therapy used to be about long hours rambling through your mental life. We don't need that any more. You are depressed because you feel depressed. You are a loser so long as you are one. So, stop it. It's a simple act of will. Stop feeling depressed. Just stop it.”

“If I could stop it, I would.”

“No. You've got it backyfrontsy. When you want to stop it, you will.”

“If I wanted to stop it, I would have.”

“But you haven't so far and therefore you didn't. And you don't. But I am saying...do. Do do! This is all about the do do. I want you to get up, walk out of this office, and stop being depressed.”

“I'd love to but...”

“No buts. Do it.”

We went around like this for a long time until I began to feel giddy from the rotation. Like being on a twirl-a-ride at Coney Island with a maniac. Giddy and on the verge of dropping. But here is the weird thing, in my tizzy what he was saying actually started to make some sense to me. What is the negative side of an insight...an oversight? Or is it an inblind? Whatever it was, I was having it.

“I think I see what you mean,” I finally said. “I’m only depressed because I’m depressed. If I’m not depressed, then I won’t be.”

“That’s terrific. Now go out there and have a nice day!”

I left the office rather light on my feet and in the head.

And the best thing of all...it took a good twenty minutes before the feeling wore off entirely.

24.

## HERMITAGE

Maybe I am looking at this suicide thing all wrongly.

Maybe there are many routes to the bottom, the sudden leap out the window being only the most operatic.

It occurred to me today that something quieter might work just as well. A ditty to the dank, a jingle even. A small series of steps rather than one big heave-and-fuckin holy cow.

To wit: I could just slowly erase myself. Throw out everything I had made, every object I had touched and every manuscript, toss out each dream one by one, methodically, carefully. Maybe then I could come to a small truth, a tiny self. And then jump through a hole no larger than a charmed quark.

It may be time to enter the hermitage then.

Not like some monkey in a monastery, mind you, but upright and striding into the hermitage of my own bafflement. I think of this as a stage between this moment of continual defenestration and another one of tiny repose.

Maybe it involves some kind of cleansing like a high colonic or a ritual like the lighting of candles. One thing I am sure is that it involves paring down, getting rid of, simplifying.

I'll start by having an apartment sale for all the big stuff....the table, the couches, the TV, all of that. I can put up a sign that reads "Everything Must Go," which is a decent theme anyway.

Then I can sell everything else on ebay...the keyboard, the camera, the statuette from Angola. Finally I could give the rest away to Housing Works...clothes, shoes, books, and all the rest.

What do I really need after all?

It will be a hermitage with nothing to my name but a pair of shoes, two socks, pants, a shirt, a toothbrush, a towel, a fork and knife, a pillow, a box of pills.

When V died on me last year, I knew that I had lost my last friend. Since then I never made an effort

and an effort never made one for me. I have no one to call particularly; no one calls me either. I have not spoken to that jackass of a brother in three months, nor do I care how his fathead of a son is doing in vocational school.

In other words, there is nothing much here that I need anymore and that is the whole idea.

Maybe my problem all along has been the imbalance between my gluebound life and the grand leap. Too much of a jump, you see? The hermitage could be a transition, like purgatory or a shower after sweating. Then I would have divested myself of all attachments one by one, step by step, carefully and with profound precision.

When I am done - and I admit that it could take a big effort to accomplish all this - there would not be anything snagging me here. I could stand at the window, look back one last time, see just an empty apartment devoid of memories and connections and stuff and...byebye Charlie.

Good plan!

I intend to start on it in the morning. The only question is where to begin, what to get rid of first. My copy of *Being and Nothingness* with marginal notes? But I liked that book. The sneakers I haven't worn in years? But they are the comfortable ones. Maybe that harmonica I never learned to play. But I might someday.

Okay, slight problem...I can see how making these decisions could take a really really long time.

25.

## FATALISM

I don't know.

Good start that. And a good way to conclude too.

If I am right about how pointless this all is, well then this not knowing is right to the point. If everything is just what it is and nothing else, then there is nothing to know anyway.

On the other hand - if there even is another hand - if it is all already worked out in the DNA maybe or as fate, then it doesn't matter what you know or don't know, do or don't do. Nothing changes it.

I was trying to explain all this to D. at lunch. She listened for a while and then just said what she always says: "You're such a fatalist."

Fatalism.

It has just enough of a depressing sound to sound just right to me. I suspect that there really is such a thing as fate. What is fate after all but what happens in retrospect? The retrospect of the cosmos, that is. Cold, unfeeling, inhuman. But at the same time, I also suspect that fate hates me.

This is not pre-determinism, by the way, in which every single thing is part of a grand web of events already decided. I do not believe in any decider. And it is also not your basic determinism in which each thing inexorably leads to the next. There



is chance, after all. I guess I have to admit that. Happenstance. Mucky luck. What else can explain D., also at lunch, telling me how she found that lottery ticket in the street and won \$3,000. Incredible.

I do not think luck likes me much either.

I once read about the so-called Idle Argument. It asserts that if it is fated for you to get better, then you will whether you call a doctor or not. If you are fated not to recover, then you won't, doctor or not. Therefore, it is futile to call the doctor. So true. I had the flu at the time, and all that made perfect sense to me even as I picked up the phone and called the doctor. Why did I call? Because I didn't feel well. Fever trumps philosophy.

Okay.

Basically it comes down to this: everything I know or think or do has already been done, if you take time out of the equation. So what is the point? I will have jumped out of the window or not, whether I decide to do it or not. So why bother.... deciding that is.

Or not deciding.

You see the problem?

You cannot escape your own escape. Fate is everywhere, lurking like dark matter. What does that mean exactly for me and my own little fateful dilemma? Something? Nothing?

I don't know.

Like I said in the first place.

26.

## LAUGHING MAN

I live, as you may have gathered, in a haranguery.

It is a rather noisy place. Traffic and other street sounds of course, but more to the point, the constant nitnitnit of nit-picking as a form of psychic tinnitus.

It is a grim place, I can tell you that. Yet even here, even I have to admit to laughter.

The possibility of it, that is.

What I mean is that unlike God and truth and the afterlife and all that, it might actually exist.

And even, in some ways, that laughter is all we got. All we ever got. *Hominix Haha*, the creature that laughs. You may think that “huh?” is the natural state of man and you may be right. But “hah!” is in there too, in the genes, in the brain, in the marrow.

We laugh when things are funny and laugh when they are - as they usually are - not. We laughed at the beginning when the first stick broke and we will laugh at the end when the universe does.

We laugh at life and in the face of death. We giggle and sniggle and snicker and snack our way through our lives. We guffaw and even occasionally guffawfaw. I once laughed so hard my nose began to bleed and that in itself struck me as so hilarious that I almost passed out. Of course, I was stoned beyond words at the time.

I'm not sure what was so funny then but I suspect that it was not something in particular but instead everything in general. Time and space and extension and change....funny, funny, funny and funny.

Give it a moment's thought and you realize that the entire shebang is hilariously ridiculous....the nonsensical Big Bang and something from absolutely nothing, the absurd history of the human species and all the ups and downs and the wars and the babies, and every infinite nook of every inane thought that was ever born and died, and the endless debates about what it all means and even what meaning means.

And what about the suffering that is at the very heart of hilarity?

And what about the absurdity of death?

Not to mention the mere existence of the rutabaga.

Ripping off Oscar Wilde, who knew a thing or two about funny...I would say that you need a heart of stone to think about life without laughing. And not just laughing but damn near cachinnating like a complete idiot. I mean, after the sweating and the swearing and the doing and the dunning, after the plots and plans and deems and dreams...after that, it all gets whisked away in an instant, never to be seen again in the universe?

Well guess what...if you don't laugh at that, you really have no sense of humor.

27.

## SILENCE

Day 27 of this journal and I woke up to a strange sound.

None.

I was not up with a jolt or a jump or a jostle. Just eyes and mind open. The window was letting in a stray shaft of sunlight that hit the wall near the dresser on an angle and turned it violet. There was no sound at all and it hit me all of a sudden and clear as a bell that the din of the morning had stopped. The drone ended, that incessance that is so stubborn and so proud. As though the universe suddenly stopped whistling an annoying tune.

Had someone somewhere pulled the plug on the pulsebeat, all those beeps and whines and hums and clicks that always fill the air? It was all gone for that instant...the creaking walls, the scuttling flies, the buzzing lights.

Instead, a big fat hush descended.

I listened for a long time but heard nothing else. No distant car horns, no laughter on the street, no subatomic howls, not even the squinch of new worlds being born inside black holes somewhere out there. The silence was total. I tapped my ear to make sure it wasn't me, and it wasn't.

It was a pause in the symphony of overtone, undertone, othertone.

I looked around without distractions then and saw the lamp on the night table, my left shoe on the floor by the door, a piece of gray lint on the sheet. Suddenly I felt as though I could see things clearly without the bumbumbum, that I could see everything just as it is. And it seemed to me then that even in that majestic silence there was still something to be heard.

And that something was nothing less than just being there. I do not even mean the relentless ping of time or the unavoidable plonk of gravity. None of that. It was more of a thrum, if there is such a word, of my own life being lived. Like a tone on a deep bell long after the sound dissipates and is forgotten by any nearby ears. A resonance somewhere between a flea fart and a volcano bletch. Maybe the sound of the cosmos before the things are put in.

It was lovely, this nothing, this no sound to be heard.

A pause that reached all the way down into the screaming of my own anguish and muffled it.

I lay there for a long time wishing it would remain...if the absence of something can even be said to remain.

No matter.

Soon there was a snap, a crack of the noisemaker, a twanging echo as, under the pressure of the dull and by the weight of the ordinary, the worldwide world came rumbling, tumbling, and grumbling back in. In another moment, the insight was out and I was just lying there, myself again alone

in the familiar din, looking around, thinking about what had happened.

Thinking about what might happen next.

28.

## CRYING

For years I had lacrimania.

I hid it of course.

Crying is maybe one of the most shameful things a man can do. Right up there with having bad thoughts about little girls. And even worse maybe because you should be able to control it. Get hold of yourself. Man up!

Granted, I was just a youngster but even so I knew it was wrong. Even disgusting in a way. And when the urge to cry overcame me, I fought it off until I could get into a private place where no one would see it and be repulsed. Except me, of course. Then the crying came like an ocean wave washing over me. When it had passed, I slapped my face to get my blood back - or perhaps to punish myself for the lapse - and went back to whatever I had been doing.

Like other sufferers, I was never crying about anything. At least not anything in particular. It was more of a broad, general sense of the urgency for tears. Despair maybe? That was never clear. I was no philosopher, just an upset kid. And it was a

feeling not a thought, as propulsive as a hormone. Nothing to do about it but let it happen.

There is a theory among lacrimaniacs that given what the world is, there are only two rational responses to it...crying or screaming. Take your pick. Turn the anger at life in and you sit and weep; turn it out and you run through the streets with a tin hat and a sign. Or a gun.

Luckily for strangers, I have always been a more private person, turning in and in like an origami tesseract.

In my defense, I eventually outgrew it. I never knew how or why. The world did not get better, not did I. I just gave it up. The way a stamp collection that seemed so important back then suddenly struck you as a somewhat pointless gathering of paper snips. Out it goes!

But then, just last year, it came back. It had apparently been in a closet, not the trash. I drove home from work, parked the car, turned off the engine, and burst into tears. Why? No idea. And yet it seemed so familiar, so cozy. A natural way to be in this world. When it passed, I went home and had dinner, watched TV, thought nothing of it until the next time, a few days later. Same routine. As though tragedy, building up quietly through every minute, reached a limit and had to flow over. Empty the pot, so to speak.

It happens occasionally now, not that often. When it does, I just let it happen. Maybe it even makes sense. Maybe you can be a man for the most part and a lacriman in the sneaky, hidden moments of life when no one is looking. Like a kind of masturbation of the tear ducts. Who does it harm? No little girls, of course.

29.

## OF HEAVEN

I had a dream of heaven last night, a hellish one in fact.

There were endless lines of dead souls waiting to be sorted. Dante was right about the circles in my dream, but wrong about the labels.

Goodness, mercy, compassion, righteousness... none of that mattered in the least. Only one thing did. Money. How much money you made during your time on earth.

No robes, no wings, no halos and no three Moirai spinning, measuring, or cutting any threads. The hucksters on television were right after all...HE wanted YOU to make money. In fact, he demanded it as payment for your right to have had a life.

In my dream, you waited in line until your wealth number was determined. This could take a really long time because it was a cosmic number calculated complexly using a very elaborate algorithm of earnings, investments, debts, caches, economic



adjustments and on and on. I was standing there for ages, in dreamtime anyway, moving like a slug towards the main gate. I think my third grade teacher, Mrs. Barnes, was just behind me and she looked really worried.

The facts of the matter are that the supreme being, in this dream anyway, cared only about our manifestation of ourselves in his image. We lived to incarnate what he cared about. Namely, tribute. We worshipped money because we were made in his image. We were thrown out of Eden not because of the whole Tree of Knowledge gambit but because we never paid for access to it. His measure of our worth was financial not spiritual and as I got minutely closer to the gate it was looking more and more like Trump Tower.

A man ahead of me on line, who looked very snappy in a pin-striped suit, seemed rather confident about his own fate. He was kind enough to explain the whole deal to me. Once your number was calculated, the rest was simple. If you made enough dough in your life, you got in. If not, there was a rather toasty doorway to go through on your way downstairs. If you were heavenbound, then your wealth decided which circle you were assigned to. Trillionaires were at the top near the godhead, sitting on golden pillows and being fanned by the cherubim. Beneath them were all the billionaires with their satin lined loungers, then came the

hundredmillionaires and millionaires followed by hundredthousandaires, and so on down the line.

I vaguely recall that the cutoff was somewhere around \$99,000, a figure – by my own quick calculation – that was not out of reach for me. But you never know how they figure it, once the divine accountants get into the mix. Needless to say, there are many deductions and loopholes. I was starting to sweat when the alarm clock mercifully yanked me out of the dream.

I immediately went online and checked my bank account. Things did not look good. I was telling myself that it was all just a dream when Robert Plant came on the radio singing “and she’s buying a stairway to heaven.”

Terrific.

30.

## **MY MOM**

Okay, I’d better get this written down before I forget to ignore it.

Having gotten all this way through, I should probably address the fact that, in retrospect and hindsight and retrosight and all that, the madness probably began with one simple thing...a need to impress my mother who, due to her own madness, was utterly unimpressable.

Yes, I’m sure that’s it, or at least worth considering.

As far back as I can recall, I had a pummeling need for her approval. A need so encompassing that it actually sapped me of energy for the more important things in life...movies, food, sports. Not sex, luckily, but only because I was too young at the time to screw it up.

From my mom, who suffered from this too, I learned to intricately inspect what people thought of me, play her self-criticism as my own self-criticism, and take no for an answer fast before anyone at all could even ask the question.

Sorry to go through this here...I mean, is there anyone duller than someone who knows too much about themselves? Certainly not, and yet I press on.

I recall spending much of youth trying to read her mood, trying to nab her attention, trying to get myself to think that she thought that I was someone special.

Maybe sometimes she did....as when she would place her thick hand on my back, right in the middle on the spine, with pressure midway between a push and a pat. But most times she treated me with a kind of wariness or suspension. Would I hurt her in some way? Would I challenge her own sense of herself? Would I disappoint her?

How much more I knew about her after she died! After I had lived through similar things and came to see her as just another yearner in the deep. But of course in the natural irony that is at the core of life, I came to see that way too late to matter.

Did she love me? Of course she did. But it was a complex ritual of intimacy and distance, affection

and affliction, approval and disavowal. Her love for me seemed tenuous, although I am sure this was not really the case. It was more the way she had of withdrawing when she was unhappy with me. But back then, all teeny and wriggly, I felt this ebb and flow of her affection like a tide and I am pretty sure that I carried this tidal habit into all my relationships.

And yet at this point, done with so much and ruminating over windows, it all seems rather fictive and narrational. Perhaps it led to some bad choices - it surely did with Y - but all of that is now in the inevitable past.

When my mom died, I wrote a eulogy and cried as I delivered it. It was a nice report and I was a respectful mourner. But I was also no longer her son and in that moment, just as well, years of incongruence came to a delightful, crashing halt.

I trust no one noticed that as I stepped down from the podium.

31.

## LUCKLESS LUCK

It started out as a good day.

In fact it began with a bowl of glum joy.

That is not a noodle dish, by the way. It is an attitude, the only sane one in my insane opinion. I am referring here to a complete rejection of both moronic optimism and utter despair. But instead,

the perfect mix of both that somehow becomes something new and savory.

The synergy of opposites colliding and the idea that things are the worst they can be in the best sense.

I cannot deny it. In some sly way I actually find this kind of contradiction tasty.

With glum joy, I have no use for the big ideas, for destiny or fate or karma. Or for time and will bending into a Mobius strip. Nor the giddy notion that the future is the past in reverse forward, and chaos the mere tip of a complex complexity.

There is a word for all this, for the simple understanding that everything is part of a plan, a revealed truth, a grand cosmic chorale in which we sing either operatic tragedies or comic show tunes.

That word is baloney.

Believe me, I have been there at the edge of things. What there is is a big fat vat of nothing. I have stood at the rim of it and I have seen into it. Trust me when I say that baloney is at the core of being, the meat inside the old cosmic sandwich. Forget the march of progress, the ascent of man, and even the cosmic hoofaroo.

What there is - and I mean really is - is nothing more than one damn thing after another higgledybiggely. You are lucky to get through the next minute intact but - through the jittering of the strings if you catch my quantum meaning - cursed to make it into ripe old age.

In other words it is all luck, random stabs that either stick or don't. We live our lives not even knowing which is which. It all comes down to just bungling.

Traveling through it - or maybe just coping with it - as a matter of choices. Some are known, some hidden; some frivolous, some dire. Skeetering, like a bug in the soup, through each tidbit, searching for a rim that never comes. Or perhaps just fully alive, it is hard to say.

And this was all hitting me before taking even the first spoonful, mind you, or bite of the sandwich. Think I have enough time on my hands? Well the joke is on you then because when I was done, I had an insight. A real true breakthrough. I mean that I finally figured out what it is all about. And the "it" in question is disarmingly simple and here it is: You put your right foot in. Then you put your right foot out. Then your right foot in and you shake it all about....

And so on.

Think about it.

In a world without meaning or purpose, what are we all doing with ourselves if not the hokey-pokey? We hokey-pokey our way from birth to death. Nothing else matters because there is no big answer, no explanation. There is only what you do in the blink of your life, the great cosmic hokey-pokey of being, turn yourself about.

That's what it is all about.

Glum, like I said. But joy too.

32.

## DOING SOMETHING

Apparently, I am supposed to do something.

Anything.

This was the task that Dr. C set for me because she thought I was spending too much time mulling and mewling. Thinking about myself. Why did I take that job at the school rather than move to Cleveland? What is that pain in my second toe? What if tomorrow I get a headache so bad that I lose my balance and impale myself on a lamp?

But I digress.

She was right of course, as this memoir proves. My own particular take on narcissism involves sitting around being depressed or thinking about being depressed or waiting to get depressed. Which misses all the fun of narcissism and overall is pretty damn depressing if you ask me, but there you are.

So what should I do?

“You need to focus on a thing,” Dr. C said in a rare moment of guidance. “Anything that is not yourself.”

Well the only thing that I do, besides staring into the mirrors of my own mind looking for myself, is to write. This made sense since besides depression, I was addicted to writing stuff down.

I was a scriptoholic making mountains out of the molehills of words and letter and punctuations. Punctuations!

The journal was proof but it was only digging me into a deeper hole. So I thought, what if I came up with a writing project that was not about me at all. Like a novel or a series of short stories about other people. You know, a book with a plot with names of characters and lives and incidents. Or maybe even a TV series with a lot of seasons.

Nice idea but not all that easy since words themselves are problems. All words, any words. Take the word ball for example. Sounds simple enough. But let's say I decide to write about it. Is the ball *on* a court? Then I have to pick it up and play with it. But if the ball is *at* court, I would have to get dressed up to go there. On the other hand if the ball is *in* court, then my lawyer would have to introduce it as evidence. You see what I mean?

Not to mention the irking fact that, for reasons I will never understand, they won't let you write *blue small ball*.

I am beginning to think that all these written words are a very tall ladder without rungs.

Hemingway killed himself, according to someone or other, probably because his writing was going down the tubes and it was all he had. I don't know much about Hemingway but I know all about the tubes. And the twirl of word and more words...a flood of utterances, tumbling out all scrambled, yolk yellowing the clarity.



When I saw Dr. C again, I told her all this.  
She said: "Write it down!"  
I said I did.  
She said: "Well, there you are."

33.

### **BLITZEN**

No, not the reindeer. The bald fact is that I know nothing about rain or anything very dear.

This is about an insight I had while waiting around to make lunch today.

I think it was tuna salad, just like yesterday.

I grabbed the can from the cabinet, the fork from the drawer, the bowl from the shelf. Then I opened the door of the refrigerator to get the mayo and - boom! - the light hit me like a ton of bricks.

Not just the light...but the Light, if you get my drift.

*Blits* means light in Yiddish and just at that instant I had a flash of it, aka a blitzen.

I realized that I was me and that this me was opening that door, seeing that light, reaching for the jar. Me.

I was the one, there at the center of my own universe, miserable as that may be. I was the one who was thinking my thoughts, tasting my tastes, wallowing in my own sorrows, making tuna salad.

Do you see what I mean? It was all me.

Sounds trite I know but what do you expect from the very me who is writing all this down?

The depression, the obsession with the window, the endless list of needs and wants and desires and thwarted hopes and rejections and frustrations...they were all me, coming from within me.

The world out there, the cosmos of the tuna salad so to speak, did not even know that I existed. It was salading its way relentlessly through its own evolution. Doing its own thing. It was not trying to torture me. God was not my enemy, not simply because he did not exist but also because even if he did, the miniscule me that was so immense in my own fantasies was no doubt nothing in his awareness.

This was my great blitzen of that moment, this sudden sense - a satori perhaps - of the endless and constant and unrelenting me, me, me, me, me, me, me (imagine, my dear reader, this chant continuing for line after line, pages and pages, bound volumes until...exhaustion, rejection, and enlightenment all over again).

Or the asylum.

But the point is that I was the one orchestrating my own misery just as judiciously as I put together the tuna salad. I was the chef and taster and patron of my own saladification.

Which meant that if I could let go of that, let go of myself, then what I would have left was simply what there was, what happened, what came next. No brooding, no grieving. No obsessing about what was wrong.

If I could do that – a kind of blitz Zen of the tuna salad – then I might just be able to figure out a way to live each day without going to the window. By just doing it rather than prancing all around it.

It was a good blitzen and it lasted all the way until I opened the refrigerator door one more time to put the mayo back at which point – boom! – the light went out and the insight vanished into the prevailing gloom.

34.

## **SPIRAL**

Another downward spiral today, always the same.

Mine certainly is.

It starts with a need, a yearning, a desire that I cannot ignore...for connection, for recognition, for success. Perhaps it is always the nagging tug to be wanted or the clutch for approval, attraction, or acceptance. It grows and growls until it is no longer just a taste or trace but soon enough an obsession.

And this is where it all starts spiraling.

It sprouts expectations, plans, hopes, wishes. Complex fantasies of fellowship, artistic recognition, winning the lottery. But these are beyond anything that the limits of real life can provide and so these twists spiral into an impossible realm. Black holes of desire sucking in all light. Nothing escapes them. They will be denied; I will fail in my quest to achieve

impossible goals based on false expectations emerging from desperate needs.

Perhaps, I sometimes think, I can just as easily spiral out, or in, or spin beyond it as if in some inter-dimensional cartoon. Step away from it, Zen my way out of it. Become needless. Have no yearnings, no desires. Just be. Do what I do and be done with it. But in the end, I approach the window once again and imagine stepping over the singularity as the only rational resolution.

Yet on the other hand, it seems that these needs, these clutchings, feel like life itself to me. Without them, after all, what would drive me? Companionship, writing, recognition....if I did not have the needs for them, then what would get me out of bed in the morning? What would be the point? The spiral is a series of epi-spirals and soon I am explaining my world as artfully and uselessly as Ptolemy.

And it is there that I am stuck. Wanting what I want and not wanting to want it. The spiral spirals in on itself and becomes an unending curlicue of dented neurons. Inflation and collapse, yearning and burning. Cycles of madness and complacency, brilliant success and dull failure. Cycles on cycles on epicycles. Like Kondratieff's economic cycles, Vico's historical ones, Spengler's cycles of civilization, Erickson's growth cycles, the Hindu cycles of 4 billion year kalpas. Menstrual, farm, business, and on and on.

I was dizzy by the end of all that, but also oddly clear-headed. I knew I had to give up the fight. Not resent this life, so circular that it had no start and no end. I closed the window and breathed on the pane, then drew a spiral from the middle out so that the outer edge became a circle and I ran my finger around this for a very long time.

A very very long time.

35.

## DYING

Someone died today.

And finally here were have a true statement, one that needs no code-breaking or head-bending. Someone died.

Actually, it doesn't look so bad when I put it that way. Given, I mean, the general toll every day, every minute, second, nanosec. The problem here was that I knew him. He was a friend of mine for thirty years.

I had to come up with something to say about him at the ceremony: the telling anecdote, the summary lifetale, the coy encounter. But I couldn't do it. Nothing seemed to sum up B. with his absurd humor about the world.

Perhaps the classic quip: well, at least this did not happen in his lifetime.

No.

All I could think of was that he was born into this mad dither, fought the good fight for a sense of himself, betrayed his dreams, watched life pass through him, and now became a ghost in someone else's dreamy dither. Mine, for example. True, but not exactly the upbeat story people would be hoping for.

I imagine myself standing there sad and silent as a stone angel for a long time, then just muttering something about how much I would miss his jokes. Like the one about...

The fact is that I am not doing well with this whole dying thing. Aging, failing, dying. B. had every disease known to man; he was a biblical test lab for pestilences. But he survived them all. Until he did not. And even then everyone had hope. One more recovery, one more time, one more miracle. Had he lived, even B. would have seen the irony in his own funeral.

Pascal: it is easier to endure death without thinking about it than to endure the thought of death without dying.

In which case, dying is not a state of being; it is a state of feeling. One is afraid not of death, which cannot be known in any case, but of the feelings of loss, separation, and shrinking that are dying at its core.

I have sat there during the other eulogies, all far better than mine by the way, and thought about all those times I knew that I was going to die but didn't.

That arc of grief from the dyingness and the hollow time, to the tearing of the heart and the confrontation with fate, waves of grief and rhythms of sorrow. And then, sometime later, signs and signals of hope, gentler thoughts, that lingering stillness and inevitably and eventually...a return to the tiniest glimmer of life. B. knew all about those and yet here he was finally and conclusively without self-pity, beyond self-doubt. Beyond fear.

I envied him in a way and I realized then that you do not lose the race of life by not living long enough; you lose it by outliving the ones who would remember you.

36.

## NEGATIVITY

This morning I got fed up with staring down the window and developed another plan. I thought about getting myself a good scalpel and trying to pluck the Stone of Folly from my head. Maybe then I could cut the crap and get back to work.

I didn't do it, of course, because ordering a scalpel seemed too complicated to handle at the time. Also, I figured that it was more than likely that I could botch the job, remove an important neuron by mistake and end up daft.

It is obvious that at this point I have gone beyond mere hypochondria. Left it in the dust in fact. I have become a full-bore catastrophist, seeing the finger of fate in every flicker, the harrowing ding

in each dent in the cosmic fender. Or maybe all of life as a kind of incurable sexually transmitted disease.

For a long time a series of books I read tried to convince me that my depression could be diagnosed. Too many glial cells in the brain or not enough serotonin or bad scripts as adaptive mechanism.

I spent years trying to find a trigger for it before realizing that the gun was not loaded. Perhaps it was not depression after all, but full-bore despair. There is a big difference between depression and despair. Depression is a learned response to frustration whereas despair is a philosophical grasp of truth.

Maybe this negativity that I cling to is not an adaptation or mechanism, but instead a state of being.

Physicists tell us that every particle of matter has an anti-particle. And that, no doubt, should include even nibbets of consciousness. In other words, every thought has its negative; every dream has a dread.

Somewhere along the line I had become a living qualm. I had become a fateful fatalister writing long lists of horrid things that might befall. That is when I switched from self-help books to philosophy. I tried to read all the philosophers of the negative from Kant to Schopenhauer but only wound up more confused.

I tried positive thinking based on the theory that if you could feel encouraged rather than



discouraged, perhaps it was possible to feel engrunted rather than dis. No dice.

I could not shake the overwhelming sense that good feelings felt fragile and bad ones terminal. It was some kind of psycho-adhesive, gluing me to the blooming gloom. Try saying that three times with your brain full of cringe.

Get thee to a glummery! I shouted and grinned at my own absurdity.

Who was I kidding? I was in love with the gloom. It was the only thing making my life worth living. The only thing that gave me purpose. Like a warrior who, without a war, wanders the land pointlessly but filled with the expectation of gore just around the corner.

Negativity was my form of positive thinking. My hope, my dream, my writing topic.

Question: Is it possible to have the same insight over and over and never get any insight from it?

Obviously it is.

37.

## AMYGDALA MAN

I went to the gym today.

Not so much to improve my physique or anything like that. I went mostly because it is underground. No windows, no heights. No chance to gaze longingly at the ground simply because it is all the way down there.

I lifted some weights, watched someone on the treadmill next to mine long enough to realize that they were not getting anywhere either, felt better about that, then took a shower. Also showering at that moment was a guy with the – how to put this cleverly – the biggest dick I have ever seen.

He was shorter than I was and trim. But bald with a face like a UPS driver. Not someone you would notice on the street, that is to say, but...

His dick limp after the shower was bigger than mine when it is erect. Not just bigger but much bigger. And longer; half way down his thigh and thick like a kielbasa.

I found myself staring, even fantasizing about it, even though I have never thought about being with another man. What would it be like, I wondered, for a woman to encounter such a thing? On a date, let's say, when you have no idea what to expect. Would it be impressive or startling? Fascinating or scary? Appealing or appalling?

I figured that he could fill up a pussy even without having an erection. What a boon that is! More proof that people are either lucky or not, that genes are the great lottery and you can twist and turn until you are blue in the face but you either have a huge dongle or you don't, for instance, and that is that.

But then later on, once I got home, I began to see it differently. I considered that the genetic lottery is a complex thing. Sure this fellow may have the meat, I thought, but I have something else. I have a much bigger amygdala than he does. I'm sure of it.

His cock may have made mine look like a noodle but my amygdala made his look like an almond.

Amygdala.

This is the area in the brain that manages fear. Pumps it out, under the right conditions, like a spurting wiener. Maybe the gym guy has massive ejaculations that turn women giddy with goop but I know for sure that I can swamp his output with the fear I generate. Like a geyser.

Maybe he could fuck any woman at a moment's notice. Good for him. But I could be afraid of anything without any notice. Snap, just like that.

Impressive, no?

38.

## THE DIALOGUE

I have been trying mindfulness as a cure.

Mindfulness, as everyone knows, is focusing on the moment, the here and now. I must not be doing it right because in this moment, in this here and now, all I think about is how lousy my past was and how terrified I am of what the future holds.

As a distraction I picked up a book from the shelves that I always meant to read but never got to. It was called *The Dialogue of Pessimism*. My kind of title.

It is an ancient text but this was not the clay tablet version and not in the original cuneiform either. Just a small paperback someone published. I am no scholar, obviously, just your average nut

looking for a case, so I finally got around to reading the translation and I have to admit, it is pretty hilarious stuff. It must have been a real hoot in ancient Akkadian. I'll wager that you could read this kind of thing all day and, simply by doing that alone, never actually jump.

I mean here is a series of chats between a master and his slave in which the master decides he has to do something, the slave encourages him, the master changes his mind, and the slave gives him good reasons for that.

Example:

I want to make love to a woman!

Make love, master, make love!

The man who makes love forgets sorrow and fear!

O well, I do not want to make love to a woman.

Do not make love, master, do not make love.

Woman is a real pitfall, a hole, a ditch.

Woman is a sharp iron dagger that cuts a man's throat.

And on and on like that through sex, hunting, marriage, eating, you name it. Even killing the slave. Do it, don't do it. Good reason, bad reason...not philosophy as much as inane sitcom. I am certain that even the ancient Mesopotamians knew it was all bullcrap. Makes you wonder why we bothered with the last 3,000 years.

On the other hand, it did have the appeal of being a kind of un-how-to book...there was no “how” at all and it was completely devoid of “to.”

This grand paralysis of words, thoughts, and deeds was the very model of me standing at the open window for days, months, maybe years on end, and never making the decision. It was comforting to know that millennia ago there must have someone else standing at a window - more likely a cliff since they had no windows - unable to make a move.

Hello my ancient friend. It is so good to know you were there first. I hope you are well.

39.

## INVISIBILITY

Today I stood in from the mirror for the longest time.

I was not looking at myself, mind you. I have not bothered with that for years. I gave up when the image there started to insult me callously.

No, this morning I was trying to look through myself. Trying to see the room behind me, in other words. But no dice. I stared and glared but all I could see was my own reflection, solid and fullsome. No gaps, no vacancies. The material body in all of its boring glory.

I could not see through myself at all.

So what was going on?

Where was my trusty invisibility?

I had started to notice this a few months ago when I first began to see that people were not looking at me. Or if they were, they seemed to be looking right through me. I went to dinner with G and tried to present a robust appearance but she kept looking down, not making eye contact. At that party at the office, glances were exchanged left and right, but they seemed to zip right past me like gamma rays, never landing on me. Someone on the street asked me for directions, but he kept gazing off into the distance as though a disembodied voice was helping him rather than me myself. Yesterday a woman bumped into me and seemed surprised to find that I was there at all.

I knew exactly what was happening though I scarcely could understand the mechanism of it. I was becoming invisible. Older, sadder, perhaps less interesting? Maybe that or something else, but no matter how I struggled with it, it was clear that I was fading away, or scattering, or simply dispersing into the air like atoms disbanding.

But then, if that was true, why could I not detect this in the mirror. Do vanishing eyes fail to see vanishing eyes?

When I was a boy I thought that invisibility would be a great power. I could move through the world undetected, watch naked women at will, even rob banks. But now I see that it is just tiresome. Not the invisibility itself, but the sense of dispersion.

The glue of my identity softening like ooze, the atoms of my dense self going massless.

When I finally figured out what was happening, it came with a sense of relief. Not the depression, that remained the same; but the confusion cleared up. The mirror, I realized, is just an illusion. It looks deep but is flat, looks life size but shrinks everything, flips the world while seeming unflipped. The mirror image is a lie and may even only reflect what we need to see in our mind's eye.

So of course I was all there in the reflection, as were the traces of all views past. But in reality, I was as insubstantial as a puff, drifting through the ether, unseen, unimagined.

I felt better about that.

40.

## FALLING STARS

Stars are falling.

Dropping like flies actually. Subtitle this entry the Suicide of the Stars in big flashy letters if you would like to.

There was another one in the news today, a famous actor. Same story, different name, along with the usual encomia, stories, legends, eulogies, flowers at the stoop, all of that.

The great, grand operatic tragedy with a cast of millions.

Very touching, I am sure.

If I go tomorrow, will anyone even hiccup? The

super in my building will most likely be annoyed to have to remove my IKEA furniture. And that, as they say, will be that.

It is baffling really. I mean, here are the most gifted people on earth...not only talented but showered. With luck, fame, health, money, praise, adulation, idolization. Everything life has to offer, and yet it is not enough? Not enough to be rich and beloved and respected and admired and in the media?

I don't know if this makes me want to laugh or heave. Why bother with any of this if it still isn't worth it to the most and the best?

And there was another thing too...the hanging.

Hanging seems to be the method of choice for suicidal celebs. They call it the "short drop" online; I looked it up. It is still falling, in a sense, but rather slowly and only a foot or two rather than stories. All you need is a high bar to hold the noose and low expectations.

Advantages over jumping: no seconds in which to change your mind, no decision to step out into the void, and no terror of plummeting. Disadvantages: it looks rather bad and has sad echoes of political murders.

But I don't know. I have been thinking and planning and visualizing about jumping for so long, it is hard for me to imagine any other way. So now that the great actor has hung himself, I have to rethink my entire plan? Marvelous. And besides, if I



followed his lead, I would have to rename this whole project Journal of a Hanging Man and that just does not sound quite right.

I feel that it lacks the coy humor.

We'll see.

41.

## ENGULFMENT

I presume that if you are still reading this - against my better judgment, I remind you - then you too are falling or at least teetering.

In which case you know that no words, no message, no slogan, is of any use at all. Just say no! Think positive! Don't beat yourself up; be upbeat instead. For the upbeaters, the answer is always simple, as it is for any true believers. It is a simple matter of reframing the debate. Good for them but you and I know very well that the world we live in is a slog not a slogan. We know - if I may be so bold as to speak for you - that nothing is simple, that life is a quagmire of complexity, and it is that mire that becomes too much to handle.

And yet, we know something else too.

We know that this complexity that so rattles us is also our salvation. We know that the antidote to suicide is the opposite of anything simple. We know that the whole idea of suicide as a simple binary conception - there is life and there is death - makes no sense. It is the complexity of life that pushes us

towards this. But the very same complexity pulls us back.

There is a leaf on my desk that I retrieved from the street this morning. An oak leaf probably. No idea why I picked it up but there it is. Look at the leaf and say “there is a leaf.” Simple. But now look at it again. Look at it quite carefully. Now study it in detail, under a magnifier if you can, so that the surface becomes a terrain and the textures become patterns of color and shape. Study the anatomy of the leaf to understand how it takes in air and sun and then grows itself. Even better, draw the endless details you see there or describe the rich complexity. Put it aside and look at it again another day. It has changed, you have changed, everything is the same and utterly different. It is still a leaf but the reduction of it to a single word has become absurd. Meaningless.

But something else has happened as well.

You have spent time – how much time is up to you – engaged in the complexity of this thing, lost in its intricacy and its transformation. And this is just one leaf and there are countless leaves, and leaves are only one thing and there are infinite things both natural and made. And time is elastic.

A simple thought lasts for a moment; an exploration endures. And in that timeless time of looking and seeing and noticing and exploring, you have done many things but you have not done the one thing....you have not had even a single simple moment to think about leaping.

Perhaps you, or some other reader of this journal, will think that because I am mucking about in this bin of words I trivialize suicide or mock the pain that leads to it. But it is just the opposite. Our greatest hope – if you are at all like me, that is – is that the sentences I have assembled here are like a leaf that engulfs you. A complexity so appealing that a leap of any kind becomes pointlessly simple, too simple to be of interest.

This is how it has worked for me.

So far.

42.

## UNMAKER

I found a book on a dusty top shelf that occupied me for a day or so.

It was called UnMaker by some fine fellow with an unpronounceable name, a mathematician who was clearly losing his mind. Let us call him Professor Atoz, as in A to Z. His work was part treatise, part tone poem, part metalogical proof, almost 600-pages of words and symbols and numbers with no consistent structure or typeface.

Were they the ravings of a lunatic or the predictions of a genius? I could not judge that. I skimmed through them amazed, abashed, confused, perplexed, and humbled by the width and breadth of his knowledge and the bulk of his derangement.

Most of it was so wide and broad that I could not even fathom it, let alone report on it. But there

was one thing that stuck with me, one takeaway worth taking.

Atoz believed that the universe at its core was nothing more – or nothing less – than a complex set of wave patterns, radiant energies of varying rhythms and rhymes. And if that were so – and he knew that it was – then a fundamental, nearly but not quite, infinite set of non-random g-shift petralogs could account for all existing waves. Okay, fair enough. I remember a chart somewhere showing all the wavelengths of energy in the universe from gamma rays so teensy they poke through matter to visible light so narrow and yet we base our whole visual world on it, to radio waves so long and lonely. So sure, waves and energies. Fine.

But he did not stop there. Like Turing before him, he did not just have a theory. He had a device in mind. And the device he was building, in his mind at least – quantum, quotidian, complete – would be able to compile that equation, the equation that would account for everything. A kind of God machine, if you want to say it that way.

Don't laugh.

Plenty of folks throughout history have had this in mind, although they didn't understand it in mathematical terms. The Jews had their secret names of God, the Mayans had their endless calendar, the Persians with their holy symbol of the One, and that tribe in New Guinea that believed that if you whispered enough truths into a gourd, you could create a new cosmos.

But here's the thing.

According to Atoz, every wave pattern in the world has an anti-wave because everything has its exact opposite. So he was also and simultaneously working to create an anti-God equation, the perfect opposite of the one that runs the world. He called it the UnMaker...and the title of the book. He knew - and it is pretty damn obvious even to a rube like myself - that a machine to realize it, to manifest it, might just have to be bigger than the universe itself.

But what if you did not actually build it? What if the process of designing and planning and thinking about it was enough to realize it? Turing's machine was only a thought experiment but it laid the groundwork for modern computing. What if that was possible here too.

What if that marvelous or catastrophic  $x$ -equation emerged from the process of simply dreaming of the machine? His very last note on this subject suggested this.

Suppose that all things that could happen might happen in time. Suppose for instance that a machine that can be plausibly conceived can be practically made elsewhere in the endless, edgeless universe. Suppose, in other words, that the device in question is only a speculation here and now but a certainty and fact sometime somewhere. The machine, this UnMaker, in that case has already been made and the universe already undone.

So what does all that do for us? If all we were waiting for is the equation to complete itself, what do we do? How did knowing all this change our conception of ourselves?

The answer apparently was in Volume II, which Atoz never worked on.

Figures.

43.

## ON WRITING

Maybe the writing itself is what saves me. So far anyway.

Maybe the writing is the hand that yanks me back from the edge. This seems to be the case since every time I get to the precipice, something occurs to me that I should write down and I back away. I could, of course, keep a pad and pencil on the windowsill. But I do not do that and that in itself tells you something.

Not that what I have to write down is so profound. Obviously. If you have read this far and do not see this clearly, then you are bigger ninny than I am. The reason is that death and words don't really mix. The window is a tribunal. On the one side of the window is the conviction; on the other is the sentence.

Inside of me of course, I can blather on forever and never get to the point. Maybe this is a survival tactic. But I do try to write with a bit more restraint. Sometimes the art of blahblahblah is even better than articulation, but not usually. You would be pleased to know about all the ideas and phrases that I have never written down or even have deleted from

this journal. Perhaps, if I can rally my words, I can finally get down to the nitty-gritty quiddities here.

Last week I threw out whole books I had written in the numbing miasma of my youth. I must have spent an entire career writing these idiotically slippery works of non-friction. Art mirrors life, Balzac said, and in a great book there are supposed to be boring parts, there must be boring parts, praise be for the boring parts. Luckily I never took that to heart and like any sympathetic artist, I have thrown out a lot more work than I have made. In some ways, I suppose I should be rather proud of the fact that I have contributed more to the trash than to history.

Balzac was French, you know, and I heard that in France the opposite of art is entertainment. Perfect. Because all I can do with my words and spaces is to generate a moment of entertainment. For me, for you. Of art I know nothing at all. Art is just an excuse to revel or wallow, as the mood strikes you, in the whole damn life thing. And who needs that?

The problem is how, in my case, a perfectly ordinary childhood of punchball, love notes, a dead father, summer camp, etc. could possibly lead to any insights about the human condition worth transcribing. Well, obviously it cannot, so then... problem solved.

I think Samuel Johnson would have a keen bead on this whole journal business. He would say - did say but not about me - that it is both good and original but the part that is good is not original and the part that is original is not good.

Ha.

Yet I press on for some unfathomable reason. Decide to jump, undecide, write, decide, undecide, write. Rinse. Repeat. After all, words have to be the cheapest bargain in the entire universe...portable, modular, reusable, disposable. It is so much easier to tidy up type than a smushed body. With words, unlike life, you can start at the beginning, proceed through the muddle, and get to the end before realizing that no one gives a shit about any of it.

Perhaps I am a writer simply because I have written. That would be nice and neat. But perhaps I am just a liar and conniver, beset by intentions and haunted by conclusions. Or maybe I am just simply a spermologer. I know how creepy that sounds but I mean a collector. Of tidbits and nits or dribs and drabs from my weensy history of hurt and loss.

In which case forgive me and do not trouble yourself to read even one more page.

Or better yet, read it and forget that you read it.

Win win.



44.

## OCEAN

I read that Arthur Koestler, while writing his suicide note, said that he had a familiar “oceanic” feeling that helped to sustain him.

I had that feeling once but it had to do with bobbing in the yummy waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The sun glowing, the wind caressing, the warm lapping and me still there, insignificant and mattering in equal parts, watching a school of fish churning in on itself endlessly.

It was a nice feeling and I am quite sure that it is not at all what Koestler meant because that feeling is wholly incompatible with the void. Or maybe not. Maybe that feeling is the perfect channel between the end of all this and the start of all that.

It is a familiar sensation, but a rare one.

Much more of my time on earth has been the opposite. An abysmal feeling that everything is nothing and that all that I have will soon enough be ripped away from me. An ode, in other words, to my glorious angels of despair, defeatism, cynicism, cringes. My trusty minions against the oppressive boot of hope.

I imagine that somewhere in between the two oceans – one dark and deep and the other vast and stunning – there must be a way to stay afloat since this is obviously what I have done so far. A balance right at the edge of sinking and soaring. But what do I know about it? *Hypothesis non fingo*....I feign no

hypothesis. I just wade ever deeper into my own words and it is hard to say whether this is rigor or just rigor mortis.

And while I am trying to drown language here, let me just add that I know how banalytical this all is. That is a made-up word, by the way. A mix of banal and analytical...boring and logical at the same time. Even as I reread this, I can feel a numb thumping. My only hope is that, while my ocean of thoughts is pure babble, it may yet be poetry in some adjacent dimension.

Here is what I think about when the balance is right, when my head is still above the waterline and the waves are not too intense. I think it may be possible to see the tough soul in the frail body I once so loved. Or what it was like to run my hand over the skin on her shoulders or to feel the wind across my face. Or that rich rare raw smell between snowflakes. A rhythmic beat in the dance hall lingering once the dancers have gone. It was all of life, there in that floating, everything that mattered. The great sweet truth.

Today I had some hope, like a veil lifting. Or perhaps the tide slipping away or the waves gentling. I felt new again, for about the ten thousandth time. Full of possibility.

I did not even think of windows at all but instead daydreamed of the ocean teeming and swirling. It slipped away of course but even now I can still recall it as a feint echo.

45.

## JOYS

I tried making a joylist today.

Believe me, it was not easy. A joy at best is a fleeting thing, tenuous, and in the grand scheme of my religion known as Bummerism, pointless. But even I have to admit to the fact that a little smooch of it was possible.

True, these joys are like ice cubes tossed into the warm waters of the Great Scalding Sea but they do float for a while at least.

I am thinking, for instance, of laughing so hard that your brain goes into a kind of buckled spasm. I've had that. Not a lot but sometimes. When the laughter itself takes over and seems to become its own reality, when what I was laughing about is gone and all that remains are the waves of hilarity washing.

Okay, there is that.

Then I thought of the feeling of warm water on my neck in the shower on a cool but not entirely chilly day. Yes! Warm water, warm bath, warm rain, warm sand, warm body.

Warm is most certainly on the list.

I recall a perfect crescent moon once standing on a deck at a house in Cape Cod in October and the way that sliver of light reflected in the ocean like a smile of itself. A boat creating ripples on the surface nearby turned it into puzzle pieces that slowly

refit. I thought about Galileo looking through his telescope and seeing what he saw and drawing it for the very first time.

The moon.

And then, a whole flood of possibles.

Skiing down a slope until I came to an abrupt stop and shpritzed fresh snow on my face. Holding T. in bed, her smooth skin radiating the soft light as a breeze slipped in through the window. One time, in the summer at camp, we took the horses out and rode them bareback in the sunlight, knees pressing their ribs, hands grasping their manes; we stopped at an orchard, stood on their backs and plucked apples; I fed my horse one and had one myself there in that perfect moment of kid horse apple sun.

Windsurfing on Long Island sound that summer when, after some practice, I began to think that I was flying over the water, no effort at all, just riding the balance between falling and sailing.

Holy hell...what is this becoming? A real list after all? Me? Joys? Was that even possible?

*Shine on You Crazy Diamond* suddenly playing in the airport as I waited for a flight back home.

Hot towels out of the dryer that I pressed against my face before folding neatly.

Seven layer cake with just the right balance of filling, cake, and chocolate.

Bossa Nova!

That magical time that I accidentally overheard that the secretary said she thought I was handsome.

Going back to sleep on that cold December morning when the show began to fall, with my feet on the radiator.

N.'s face before, during, and after we made love...

And there were more. Much more. Moments only but ones that held within them the sense of being alive for a reason. And the reason was its own reason, just to be alive. Perhaps this list will turn out to mean something...or maybe not. Maybe even I, the Duke of Dour, can see that these items are the only things that matter in the end, amen.

46.

## **SELFLIES**

I braved the mirror again today and saw a sadsack sight. An impostor, to be honest, trying to fool an audience of one.

This trick generally worked but somehow today it was different, perhaps due to the light from the window or the smudge on the surface of the glass. Today I could see the scam as though the mirror was flipping truth and lies as well as left and right.

Yes, the lies!

Where do I start?

With the little flimsy ones...like telling myself that I was a tad taller than my height. Or the big fat one....the storytale that I always tell myself that I am more than I am, more than I could ever be.

This is not just pretense or a little web of fibbing. This is mendacity on a monumental scale. More talent than I had, more appeal than was the case, more potential than ever possible. The lies, in other words, about what kind of person I was.

Up until that moment, I presumed that selfishness was at the core of my problem. All the decisions I made that were only about me and me and me and mine. The bad choices, the breakups, the dead end turns. And all because I never thought outside of myself and my little universe of needs.

But here is a new idea.

At the heart of the matter - the core of the core so to speak - was lying. What I made up about myself and then convinced that same self it was true. I saw it quite clearly standing there, exposed and reflected and judged. I told myself that I did not want kids because I had greatness to rear but in fact I was a kid kidding myself. I believed that I left that marriage because I walked off into the sunset rather than actually watching her run away. I never got promoted because the job was too small for me rather than the other way around. And so on.

Yes, a sad case surely. But not a tragic one. No of course not. I mean, look around. But still...

Tomorrow - and there is always a tomorrow until there is not - I will cut the crap. Cut myself loose from the weeds of my own legends and delusions. Tomorrow I will embark on an ordinary existence without deep passions, sans urgencies or flame-ups. A small life, inches shorter than planned.

Just a shining dullity, going to work without ambition, coming home to sleep without dreams.

I wrote down “selflies” as the topic for this little confection of confession. I meant that the mirror in a sense took selfies - snapshots of the self - but I ended up with that typo that turns out to be the real problem...self lies.

47.

## **FAITH**

I often wonder if faith would matter.

I could not say for sure since of faith I have none. Not in anyone or anything and most of all - that is, least of all - in myself. Meaning and purpose are meaningless and purposeless to me. In my very concise view of life, we are born for no good reason, live out a brief time in some swirl of good and bad karma, then are good and gone.

Pffft.

Yet I keep scrambling for something to believe in nonetheless. I think it would help in some way. And in my hunt I came across this word: *dieuquidonne*. That's a very nice looking word there. The god who gives.

I envy those folks who believe. Not the maniacs of course, but those of silent and tenuous faith. The ones who believe in a giving god, for example, even though to me *dieuquidonne* is nothing more than a fancy pack of vowels.

Still, I keep looking.

Like a grim pilgrim, I search and wander, trying to see if there might be some dust bunny of faith gathering somewhere in a corner of me. Every so often I find a promising speck. Like this from Unamuno: "Those who believe they believe in God, but without passion in the heart, without uncertainty, without doubt, and even at times without despair, believe only in the idea of God, and not in God himself."

That's pretty good. True believers, in anything, are dangerous and none more than those who have the Word as a weapon.

And then there was this from William Sloan Coffin: "Faith is not a matter of belief without proof, it is a matter of trust without reservation." Also nice but it does imply that you either have it or don't. And since I do not, these are not convictions that I share even if they are worth sharing.

Overall, I am not sure why any of this matters. All of life seems like particles of dust on the grand cosmic scale and so believing or not believing in god, for one, does not change what we think we must do...not one mote of it. The rules we follow should be engraved inside the heart not written on a temple wall.

If I have faith in anything it is mostly in the hun-tun hub of the hubbub. What there is, in other words, and not one speck more. In this way, the opposite of faith is just simply what is. In a stretch I can understand the idea of being an agnostic. Maybe. And like Huxley, who invented the word,



think of God as the totality of being. Or Spinoza: knowledge of nature is knowledge of God. That is, the cosmos and every cos and mos in it. Not up in heaven or over there by the altar. Not God the vengeful or the forgiving, the wish granter or the tormentor, the all-knowing or the dead. Not anyone or anything. Not anywhere.

Instead, God as a symphony in which we all play...soft or loud, solo or in concert, now or later. Buzzy bee and humming human alike, this music resonates everywhere and we call it life or God or the world which, in the end, are all the same thing.

If I had to pin it down, and I know that I do not, I would say that I have become an anthrodeist, if there is such a word yet.

Anthrodeist.

I may believe in god, most definitely. But my faith is in the idea that we created god and not the other way around. That does not, of course, make god any less real in the same way that we made up justice but it is still there in any case. If and only if one has faith in it.

So in the end, as it turns out, I am not just the cynical atheist but a true believer after all. Faith in the ingenuity of humans to conceive of the world. Beings in touch with the deeper truth that lies below the lies, the unity of everything, the pulse of existence. Not to mention the bopbop rebop of the ether as it pulses.

Yes, let us not forget to mention that!

48.

## NOW DIS

If I go deep enough, below the memories and the regrets and the sense of myself in left field waiting to bumble the ball...

I mean really deep down into the marrow of my own consciousness, down there in the dark tissue of the dismal cortex...

Way down where there is no more gravity to yank or air in which questions might fester...

Yes, in that placeless place, facing myself down in the dark, there is one sensation that emerges. One core feeling, a singular awareness...the sense of being wrong. Not in any particular way but in every way. Wrongness itself may be the reason for all these seamy words and wordy schemes. Like a very obvious ontological zit you cannot pop.

And still it is a mystery because what exactly am I so wrong at? Does there have to be something? Or does the knowing come before any being? I remember reading in Brentano that consciousness is always consciousness **of** something. Makes sense. Otherwise you would just be a blob of awareness with nothing to ware. So in a similar vein, is being wrong always being wrong **at** something? I don't think so. After all, in the grand scheme of things, I lived, I loved, I longed, I lingered. I did what I did. What did I actually do that was wrong?

I do vaguely recall – or am inventing - the look on my mom’s face when she first saw me. That look of puzzled concern. Now maybe it was her own anxiety or, just maybe, she knew right then and there that I came out all wrong. So did it all start then? Even if I did make that up?

Maybe there is just wrongness at the root, baked into the neurons, cooked in genes. Nature not nurture. Maybe there is a gene – WrONG1 let us call it – that shoves an enzyme that rams a protein that bashes into some mix of serotonin and guilt and floods the brain with ill-advised juice. I don’t know; I am no biologist.

Or maybe this feeling is the way that I have concocted to deal with my own sensitivities. You know, he who needs too much and so on. I heard there were dinosaurs who roamed the earth only in search of a kind word. They were wiped out too.

In which case, maybe this is all just my way of dealing with the nose. Oh, sorry about that, I meant to write the No’s. I know that I have mentioned this before but repetition is the mother of obsession. The rejections and disappointments and all the teensy weensy ways in which life kicks you in the ass and then whistles and pretends nothing happened. Each kick impacting this core, stuffing it fuller and fuller of displeasure until the whole little innerverse is built on it. Somewhere along the line, I guess, I misread that bumper sticker that H. had on her

Honda and began to follow my dis rather than my bliss.

To counter that, I put a Post-It on my desk that says *Patior Ergo Sum*. I hurt therefore I am. Hurt, wrongness, discomfort, loss, insecurity. All part of the same genetic brood.

That is why when I read Schopenhauer, at least the good parts in the abridged, I knew that he was right. This irritating will to live with its futile, endless striving. That constant wanting that can never be satisfied and the suffering that results. The Blind Giant of the Will, which can never be sated. I explained all this to H. one day and she thought I was just being cute.

“What about happiness?” she insisted and with a straight face too. Ha, I said but choked on the rest of the word. Happiness is a scam, I finally spit out, satisfaction a sham. They are nothing more than band-aids over the wanting. The old kind that will not even stick anymore.

She went back into her same old song and dance about the bright side, the power of Yes, and all the rest. I know that she was only trying to help. I told her that I tried that - tried to turn my wrongs into rights and so on - but all I got was a case of tinnitus. Needless to say, after going back and forth for quite a while, we did not have sex that night.

49.

## THE LEASH

As you well know, I have been struggling with that window for a long time. Even before the 49 days that started this diatribe. Approach, retreat, swoon over, recoil from, and so on.

But today I made a great find that changes everything. The bottomless window, the endless fall, the eternal me...all of it.

I read about some guy who actually found a way out. I had heard of this before, it was rather popular among celebrities but this article explained it in great detail and it hit me like a mindstorm in the murk. Suddenly I saw a whole new way of thinking about things. A better way.

I would go out, as he did, and buy a long leash, those thick woven ones they sell, possibly red to represent the sheer beauty of the idea. Or blue to stand for the mood. In any case, I would also buy a choke color, probably in a matching color, a thick one that you might get for a pit bull or a German shepherd. The kind that slips through a ring and pulls tight.

I would also gather my pills and a bottle of blackberry brandy. And there it is. This simple set of tools would be my exit kit. Do you see how the sense of freedom and even liberation might wash over me about it? So tidy, so quiet. No plunge, no

drama, no physics of air turbulence, no glop to clean up afterwards.

Here is how it works, it all its lovely simplicity.

I will put the loop part of the leash around the inside doorknob of a closet. I will run the leash over the top of the door and close the door as well as I can so it does not slip. I will put the bottle of brandy on the floor. I will then attach the choke collar to the leash and place it around my neck. Now, I will turn around and get myself into a kind of chairless sitting position with my back against the closet door.

I will have already taken that mixture of drugs I concocted but now, in my leaning sit, I can drink the brandy until I begin to pass out from the alcohol and the valium, which by the way is a rather pleasant way to drift into blithery.

Once I am out, the weight of my body will pull me down from the squat, tightening the choke until...you see?

It could work. It did for him.

And the beauty of all this is that it is still falling. No need to change the name of the journal! It simply is falling a few inches rather than a few floors. The short fall, as they say, but still falling through the web of life and out into the obliviad. No need to overcome my fear of heights either, since I would be starting at the bottom already.

A great calm overcame me when I understood all this.

Later today, I will go out and buy these items. I will treat them respectfully by coiling the leash neatly and checking the closet door for stability. I will test it out once to make sure my calculations are right. Then I will sit down next to the window that has haunted me for so long and not be afraid of it or in thrall of it either. It will be just a window again. It will no longer seduce me because I have done what human beings have done for millennia, what we were born to do.

I have found a better way.

Yes, later today for sure.

Or maybe tomorrow; there is no rush now.

50.

## MIRACLE

Even I, pessimist to the gloomy-doomy core, have to admit that there are such things as miracles.

Maybe they are just happenstances happening or events unfolding in very mundane ways, yet to consider such things as miracles puts another spin on them. A more, shall we say, poetic one.

I know this is the case because I have a very good example of one.

Myself.

I shudder to even type these words lest someone assume that I am beginning to believe in anything – or morphing into some kind of (gasp) optimist...but here it goes.

I am a miracle.

Well, not me exactly but the mere fact of my existence. Think about it because it is true for you too. For me to be here right now, an endless string of impossibilities had to have happened.

Even if we dispense with the unlikelihood of a big bang starting it all off with the just right balance of matter and anti-matter, water and warmth, and then cellular genesis, evolutionary great escapes, humans evolving from the great mammalian tree, and so on.

In other words the just right, perfect, irrefutable balance of unlikely factors coming together...

But let us move on from that heady swoosh and just with mere people.

For me to be here now, an uncountable number of ancestors of mine had to survive into puberty and meet and mate at that exact right moment when it was possible to make the next one along the line. Not eaten by wild boars, not fallen off a cliff, not dropped by the zillions of microbes that seem to detest us, or any of an endless number of other dismal scenarios.

Back to the beginning, what are the odds of each and every one of those ancestors doing the same thing through earthquakes and wars and floods and plagues and who the hell knows what all.

Yet they all did.

Every single one of them all the way down to my own parents who lived and survived and



somehow found each other and decided to try one more time even though it was most unlikely.

And then there is me, born into a world in which people can live to be as old as I am now, and eluding all manner of tragic twists and turns so that I can type these words right now, right here, in this very moment of my life.

It is a stunning descent through impossibility if you think about it. In other words, a miracle to be sure and if you, my dear unnamed cohort, are reading this then you are too. We both are just impossible enough to be possible. And that my words might last through fire and storm and time to reach out to you whom I have never met....well that is surely a miracle on a miracle.

And I say hello to you my miraculous friend and is it not a fine thing to be here as we are. Even finer than all the suffering that sustains us? Hello to you and I wish you well.

And perhaps, in some strange way, this connection we have, you and me, is a reason to step away from the edge if even only for a few more moments, and share our stories and revel in our time, no matter how dark it may sometimes seem.

Hello to you, my dear friend.

Hello.