Divine Madness

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By

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To Meghan, David and Colleen Ross

May life be a secret garden
Where enchantment is still possible

Lila is Sanskrit for *play*, the *play* of the gods. It is the *self-generating genesis* of *Bliss*, created by *Bliss* for the purpose of *Bliss*. It is the uninhibited, impulsive sport of Brahman, the free spirit of creation that results in the spontaneous unfolding of the cosmos to be found in the eternity of each moment. It is beyond the confining locks and chains of reason, beyond the steel barred windows looking out from the cages of explanation, beyond the droning tick-tick-tick of the huge mechanical clocks of time.

Come, let us enter the realm of the *madman* and the finely wrought threads of Clotho as they are measured out by Lachesis and cut by Atropos to create the great tapestry of life, including the intricate, intertwining designs of *dementia* with the *trickster*, the *shaman*, the *scapegoat*, the *shadow*, the *artist* and the *savior*.

Come, let us join in the *divine madness* of the gods.

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Elwood P. Dowd: "Well, I've wrestled with reality for 35 years, Doctor, and I'm happy to state I finally won out over it."
—Mary Chase, *Harvey*, Oct. 15, 1950

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Wer Uber gewisse dinge den Verstand nicht verliert, der hat keinen zu verlieren. (He who does not lose his mind over certain things has no mind to lose.)
—Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his play *Emilia Galotti* (1772), IV, vii.

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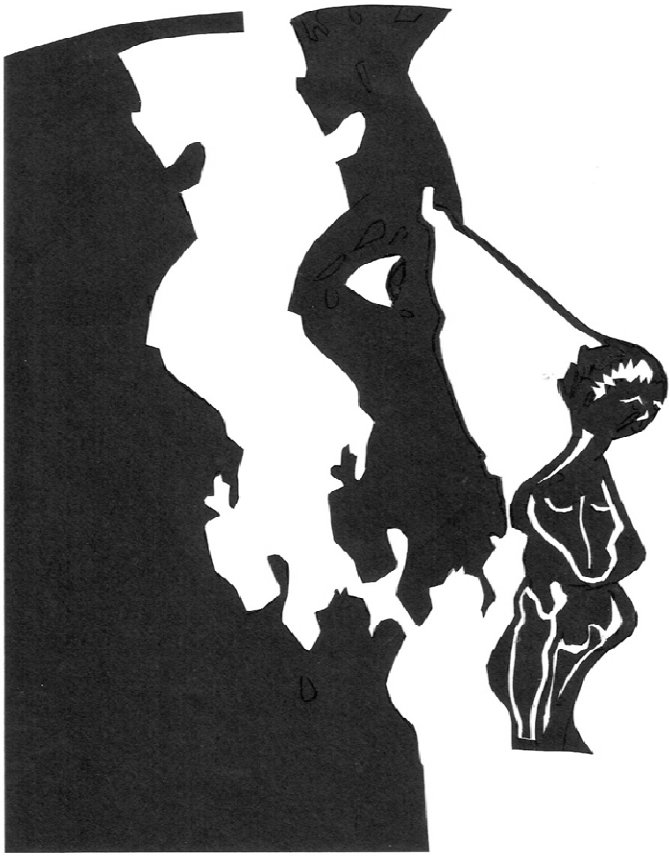

Whisperer

In the time when Johann Casimir was Duke of Coburg, his Master of the Stables was named G. P. von Z. This master of the stables first resided in the street called Spitalgasse, *afterward in a dwelling subsequently inhabited by D. Frommann and then in a large villa outside town, which was called* Rosenau. *Finally he took up residence in the castle, where he also acted as captain of arms. A ghost forced him to these frequent moves. In appearance this spirit looked exactly like his living wife so that each time when he entered a new dwelling and sat at his table he often doubted whether he was in the presence of his true wife. For the spirit followed him out of each house and everywhere. When his wife once again suggested moving into new living quarters to avoid the ghost, the apparition began to cry out in a loud voice: "Go where you will. I will follow you, even to the ends of the earth!" This was not an idle threat for when the Master of the Stable moved out, the doors of the houses he left behind slammed shut with ferocious force. From then on the spirit was never seen in the abandoned house but only in the new residence.*

Every day when the true wife dressed herself, the ghost appeared in the same clothing regardless of whether it was a fancy dress or an every-day dress and the colour of the fabric didn't matter. This is why the wife never went about her household tasks alone, but was always accompanied by a servant. The spirit often appeared between eleven and twelve o'clock. If a priest or man of the cloth was present, the ghost did not appear. When once Johann Pruescher the Father Confessor had been invited and the noble man and his wife and sister accompanied him down the stairs, the spirit began to climb the stairs from below at the same time. Through the wooden rail it gripped the young maid's apron and disappeared when she began to scream. Once the spirit lay on its side over the threshold to the kitchen. When the cook asked "What do you want?" the spirit responded "I shall have your mistress." But the mistress of the house never experienced any harm. Things did not go as well for the young maid, the sister of the noble man. One time the spirit hit the girl so hard in the face that her cheek swelled up and the girl had to return to her father's house. Finally the spirit retreated and it became peaceful in the house once more.

— Brothers Grimm, #260

CREDITS

I want to thank Noreen Parker for her valuable, intelligent editing help with this work. It would not have the professional quality it has without her efforts.

I also want to thank Joel Rudinger for his exceptional illustrations, which could stand on their own as superb works of art and most certainly add to the textures of the book.

PREFACE

Rape of Sedna

In Inuit mythology, Sedna is the creator-goddess of all the sea animals. When a central Eskimo hunts for seals swimming under the fields of ice or for whales in his walrus skin umiaq far out at sea, he asks Sedna to feed his family. If he honors the animal's spirit and pours fresh water into its mouth when it has been killed, Sedna will send him another at a later time of need. But if he does not honor the spirit of the animal and neglects to give it water, Sedna will rise in anger and with-hold her gifts. Then it is bad luck for the hunter. For at all times, one must be worthy.

It is also said that when famine strikes, the spirit of the village shaman swims to the bottom of the sea to ask Sedna to send his people food animals. If she allows him to comb luck out of her watery hair, they will find food and survive.

—Joel Rudinger
Sedna: Goddess of the Sea

Joel Rudinger and I sat at a small, round table, one of those high tables with tall chairs that prevent the feet from touching the floor. He had come to Eastern Michigan University to discuss his book *Sedna: Goddess of the Sea* with my World Mythology and Critical Approaches to Literature classes, and now we were taking a break to have a light lunch at the new Student Union, an impressive building with a two-story wall of windows overlooking a pleasant man-made double pond that had a picturesque, white walking bridge over its short connecting channel and three water sprouts in each bay sending glistening water sprays some thirty feet into the blue, sunlit sky.

“So, how was the cruise to Alaska?”

“Good, a bit of a journey into my past.”

“I remember you mentioning that the ship had a number of deck hot tubs, and when it got into the Arctic Circle it was possible to sit in them and watch the Aurora Borealis**.”**

“The Northern Lights are only visible at night. During the summer, there is daylight twenty-two hours a day, so while the aurora was alive and well, none of the ship passengers saw it. However, during my four years in Alaska I saw it often. I remember well one time I saw a full blown display of greens and whites and violet undulating waves emanating from the newly discovered Van Allen Radiation Belt. It was in 1962 and I was driving my new 1962 VW Beetle from college to Fairbanks. I was so mesmerized by the astral display of lights that I drove left of center and was immediately pulled over by a Fairbanks police car and given a $100 traffic violation fine.

“Did you find evidence of the Sedna story across the straight in Russia as you hoped?”

“Didn’t get the chance to talk with them as much as I wanted.”

“Well, what did you find?”

“Here’s the story. Susan and I took a ten day vacation on a 120 passenger Cruise-West ship from Whittier, Alaska, to Kodiak, then to Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian chain and finally into the Bering Sea. We had permission to enter Russian waters and visit two communities, Providenia and New Chappalina, where I hoped to ask some Siberian natives if they knew the Sedna narrative. Didn’t want to use the word "myth" or “legend” with regards to Sedna since either word would imply a fiction, and if, in fact, Siberian Yup'ik Eskimos still held some kind of ritualistic belief relationship with her, it could be insulting.

Providinia was a small town with paved streets, eight story weatherworn concrete apartment buildings, unmarked stores, a small hillside cemetery, a large statue of Lenin, and a social hall. Most of the townspeople were

white Russian. I did not see many Eskimos in the streets of the town, although natives and young Caucasian dancers performed for the people of our cruise ship in the social hall. Providinia had, at one time, serviced a military outpost a few miles north of town, but that outpost had been decommissioned after the Cold War.

However, we did take a rocky bumpy hilly jaw-jumping teeth rattling ride in some kind of old large boxy springless transport bus to the small native village New Chappalina, where the population was 95% Yup'ik. There we attended another concert/performance, and the natives had set up a gymnasium with craftsmen selling their carvings at ridiculous prices ($1500 for a little stone carving, a souvenir from Siberia for rich tourists). Only five people spoke to us in English, a fisherman who was demonstrating his fishing techniques, an older woman who translated for a young man with sled dogs, our two tour guides who had come with us from Providenia, and a woman who introduced the show. There were few natives who spoke English, and the adult whites in Providinia walked by us without eye contact. One little five-year-old girl walking alone down the middle of one of the streets in town said to me in perfect English, "hello," but other than a general store shopkeeper who was looking to sell some wares, and the local tour director who was paid by Cruise West, we had minimal contact with the people. So, no, I didn't get much of a response from the Siberian population. I had little opportunity to ask because we were also under constant scrutiny by the Russian police. To be honest, I think more people spoke English than they let on, since that part of Siberia can probably pick up Alaska TV stations, and some may have had satellite.

Just before I left on the trip, I was in contact with a Canadian researcher named Neil Christopher. In an email to me in 2008, he wrote, "I am jealous of your opportunity to visit some Siberian sea coast villages. According to what I have read (and several interviews) you should be able to find a version of the sea mother in that region. I think in the book Kappianaqtut I listed some names recorded in Siberia and the Bering Strait region."

Looking into Christopher's book, *Kappianaqtut*, the one Siberian reference I found was "Nulirah," "old woman." An Asiatic name for her is "Nulirahak" or "the big woman." A good number of different native names come from the eastern parts of northern Canada, such as Baffin Island, and Greenland. All this means that even if I would have been free to mingle with the general populations, they probably would not have known the name Sedna. However, this is conjecture on my part. A synopsis of her story might have been recognizable.

Of greater importance, though, was my discovery of the story knife that shows up in the book. Native girls often carried "snow" knives. Anyway, the ancient carved ivory story knives I found in a native museum in Barrow in 2007 were an exciting discovery since I instantly saw their use in my narrative.

I had gotten to know Joel through the years as we gave presentations at a number of Popular Culture Association conferences throughout the United States and Canada, and his experiences in Alaska, introduction to the Inuit world of folktale and myth, and eventual publication, *Sedna: Goddess of the Sea* had led me to invite him to visit my classes to help facilitate my students' comprehension of the reality and power of sacred rituals and texts, and how they allow us to connect with the world of the spirit.

Joel was sparked to write the book because other versions of the story, most notable the one by the San Souci brothers misrepresented it, turning it into a silly, shallow insult. In the hope of getting my students to understand why this other version of the story was missing the point and why the real versions of the story were so important, I had pushed Joel to give his own interesting story of how he came to know the real depth and power of it and the whole world of Inuit mythology and spirituality. He would later write it down in a book I edited:

> In June, 1960, I was to graduate with a major in zoology, but my interests had begun to switch from parasites and microscopes to literature and creative writing. Spearheading this change was an Invertebrate Anatomy class research paper on Professor Karl Von Frisch's theory on how bees (*hymenoptera*) communicated and navigated by polarized light. The paper was well researched and it had earned a grade of A. But as Professor Ed Karlin held it out to me, with a dramatic gesture, he took it back and, with his Parker fountain pen, added a thick black minus after the A. He told me that it was an excellent paper, that he enjoyed reading it, it was well researched, but it was not written in scientific language. "It is not a scientific paper," he said. "It is a twenty-five page poem, and I suggest you change your major, because you do not, and probably will never, think like a scientist. But you write well. Go into English!" He was a wise man. In my heart, I knew he was correct. And the next day, I gave all my precious hand-prepared slides of stained tissues simples of cross-sectioned parasites to a classmate who was blissfully looking forward to a career of teaching high school biology.
>
> I sent out letters to several universities to see if I could get into a graduate English program. Having read the article in the magazine, I also wrote to the University of Alaska to see if they had a Masters program in English. A week later, I got a response from the U of A in Fairbanks

saying that they did, indeed, have a brand new program. An application to the Graduate School was included.

Three weeks later, I sent them the unimpressive results of my Graduate Record Exam, filled out the application, sent official transcripts with my pitiful twenty-four credit hours of English, and—as if it was meant to be—a week later the Dean of Students wrote to tell me that my application had been accepted! I was hired as a graduate teaching assistant in the Department of English at the University in Alaska starting the day after Labor Day in 1960.

I stopped by my invertebrate anatomy professor's office to tell him the good news, but he was no longer there. He was, in fact, home in bed dying of cancer. He would pass away soon after I left Ohio. He was the first of many helpers and guides who showed up to alter and redirect the course of my life, a life leading ultimately to Sedna, the Inuit sea goddess.

Now that I was starting a new direction, I was about to leave behind everything familiar. My parents were surprisingly supportive, especially my mother. My friends thought my plans were exciting. I boxed up my dictionary and a few other books, sold my black mother-of-pearl drum set for $200, and my 6 cylinder 1954 emerald green, stick-shift, mint-condition two-door Buick with the white wall tires for $600, bought a new Smith Corona portable manual typewriter, a large steamer trunk, two new white dress shirts wrapped in cellophane, a heavy green checkered sport coat, and a black tie to teach in. I bought a one-way flight to Fairbanks and was ready to go. The steamer truck and boxes of books were sent ahead by train. I followed a week later. The first thing I wanted to see was the building pictured in the magazine. I knew, of course, that there would be no moose hanging from the window, but still I thought, maybe. . . .

When I walked into my Freshman composition classroom in the Bunnell Building on the U of A campus, there sat thirty students. Many were native Alaskans. But, if truth be told, cultural curiosity was not high on my agenda. I was struggling, teaching two composition classes while taking three high level classes of my own as a graduate student. I had no care, no time for social life, temperatures dipped regularly to minus 30, and winter nights were twenty-two hourse long. At one point, I kept a suicide journal. It was not an easy time. In short, I had lost my vision.

At the end of my first year at the university, I was homesick and decided to return to Ohio. But my life was to be affected by another unexpected Helper and Guide, Dr. Charles Keim, Professor of Journalism. Chuck Keim had shared with me the process of writing his biography of Dr. Otto Geist and had given me a tour of his writing studio over his garage. He was also a hunting guide, and in April 1961, he asked if I would like to be a "packer" for big game outfitter Hal Waugh. Chuck was going to work for him as a guide in the Post Lake region of the Alaska Range that summer and Hal needed a "packer" for his hunting party out in the mountains. A packer, as I found out, was one who packed out the meat on his back when a moose, sheep, caribou, or bear was killed at a distance

from Base Camp. Although I had already sent all my books and clothes back to Ohio, my two crisp white dress shirt still in cellophane, remembering my initial reason for coming to Alaska—to experience new things and build life memories—I said yes. The next day I was told that I had the job.

The Post Lake packer job would not begin until August and my teaching contract was over in May. Needing to find work between times, I went to the Fairbanks Office of Unemployment and found that the Alaska Railroad needed extra gang laborers for the summer. I went to the ARR employment office, filled out an application, and was told to be ready to go to work as a "gandy dancer" the following Monday. The only clothes I now owned were Army surplus pants and shirts; a gray, felt wide-brimmed Dobson hat; and a pair of Red Wing boots. On Monday, I arrived at the railroad station, got on a gang car, and was transported sixty miles to a siding where several railroad cars were sidelined and waiting. There was a dining care and several sleeping cars divided into small cubicles, one double bunk bed per cubicle. When I stepped off the train, I looked around. I was the only white guy, except for Billy the foreman. Everyone else was an Alaskan or Canadian native.

The work was hard, prying up heavy creosoted ties and tamping new gravel under them with a long handled shovel to level the track. We got up at three in the morning to beat the blankets of mosquitoes that swarmed up from the tundra in black, whining, undulating clouds exactly at 2:30 in the afternoon. If we worked a few minutes late and didn't get back into the cars, I would be literally covered; my shirt, pants, gloves, and hat were black with live blood-sucking insects. I noticed that the natives didn't seem to be bothered by them. The mosquitoes would hover by the thousands over them but never land. Their skin had developed a natural repellant. It was only Billy and me who had a problem. And Billy had a very private stash of repellant.

Horace Smoke was my roommate in the sleeping car. He was a forty year old Athabascan Indian from Yukon Territory, Canada. In the afternoons, after the mosquitoes had risen and we had taken refuge in the dining car, he would tell me stories of his life. He had been a dog musher back home and had twice won the Yukon Quest. Horace told me the prize was $10,000 for first place, huge money in the 1950's and early 60's, but in the summers, he came to Alaska to work on the railroad. The pay was good and he could send money back to his family. Horace told me stories of hunts, some tall tale "stretchers" I suspect, and made a few allusions to some colorful characters who lived in the tundra, but I did not yet understand the importance of his stories. Horace was unknowingly setting the stage for things to come. He was quietly showing me how traditional stories were inseparable from cultural values. He was, to some extent, another Helper and Guide, although I would not know that until years afterwards.

As a work-soft college student and a native of suburban Toledo, Ohio, I had never done any hard maual labor. I had seen prison chain gangs working along the roads in Florida and Georgia, but I had never translated their activity into physical pain. Suffice it to say that after two and a half tortuous weeks of blood-sucking mosquitoes, heaving gravel with wrist-twisting, long handled shovels, pry-barring up heavy ties still spiked to the rails, my body rebelled, and I quit. The other laborers were wiry, strong, and hardened. They had done this type of tough work all their lives. The next day, I flagged down the commuter train as it came around the bend and rode back to Fairbanks thankful to be alive and relatively undamaged.

Back in Fairbanks, I found work on the university garden crew until my packer job began in August. I flew to Anchorage, picked up the chartered float plane by the airport, and was flown out to Post Lake on the North Fork of the Kuskokwim River, 250 miles from nowhere. The base camp consisted of a cook tent, three crew tents, three tents for the client-hunters, two canvas latrines, a meat drying rack, and a food cache on eight foot pylons, all spread out on the tundra's muskeg. This was my home for the next forty days. This is where I saw brown bears, moose, Dall sheep, caribou, fox, wolves, golden eagles, ravens, magpies, and ptarmigan. The mountains went from green to white as the snows came. Post Lake went from blue to white as the ice began to form. Before the snow came, the slopes of the mountains were covered with blueberries. Sometimes I would stand at a fording place at the river's edge just looking, surrounded by vast silent beauty. One day while waiting to cross the Kuskokwim with a pack of food on my back and a concern for grizzlies up-stream—not another human within five miles—I saw the snow-capped mountains in front of me shift. It was a pure moment of elusive grace. It was magic. This was the moment and the place that I discovered indefinable spiritual existence. This was the place and the moment I fell in love with Alaska. My vision had returned.

I resumed my graduate studies and was ready to graduate in May 1964. I had written a creative thesis, the university's first, and since I had just been accepted into the University of Iowa's Graduate Writers' Workshop, I thought it would be fun to have some of my poems translated into Eskimo. I knew a young education major named Cecila Ulroan. She was from Hooper Bay, a Yup'ik village on the Bering Sea. Cecelia agreed to translate a few of my poems into the Yup'ik language and let me record her translation. I gave her three of my poems, made a date for that weekend for her to come to my apartment for supper, and afterwards I would record her voice on my Wollensok reel-t-reel field tape recorder. Cecilia did a good job translating. Then, when she was finished, she looked up and said, "Would you like me to sing you a song in my native language?" And so she sang a few songs in Yup'ik about snowballs and picking berries. Then she asked if I would like to hear a traditional story from her village. "Yes," I said. And she told me the story of "The Fiery Hand," a monster that floated through the air across the Bering Sea to eat disobedient children.

> As I listened, I felt that this was yet another life-changing moment. Horace Smoke had told me stories of his life and village; this was the first I had heard a real Alaskan folktale-legend. It opened up a new world of imagination. I was hooded like a salmon with a mouthful of chum. (pp. 40-44)

Joel's career would lead him from his Master of Arts Degree at the University of Alaska and a Master of Fine Arts degree in poetry from the University of Iowa to a Doctorate from Bowling Green State University, which hired Dr. Ray Browne in 1968 to create a program in Popular Culture while Joel was there. Since Joel had a strong background in folklore, Dr. Browne hired him to teach a senior level course in it, and then, when Joel completed his dissertation, he got hired at the new Firelands branch campus in Huron, Ohio, which resulted in him teaching the Firelands courses in children's literature. And this is where he encountered the San Souci version of the Sedna story, and it sparked his own research and eventual picture book of the story.

His version is a hard-hitting, honest presentation of the Inuit world, a harsh environment where the raw forces of nature are fully capable of presenting that combination of stunning beauty and frightening horror that brings a real sense of the sublime, a viseral experience of the *grace* Joel wrote about. I wrote the following for the back cover of the book:

> Sedna appears in many forms, some friendly, some frightening, even horrific. She is the Inuit creator-goddess, and her stories connect the Inuit with the cold, often cruel world that surrounds them, a world that cannot escape the forces of nature and the closeness of life with its often dangerous textures. The mythic spirits of this world are not refined or distant, but are rough-hewn and real. And it is the water and its moods that drive the life of the Inuit. So it is fitting that Sedna lives deep in its threatening and mysterious caverns. Sometimes beautiful, sometimes macabre, she expresses the sublime, a world beyond comprehension, beyond ethos, beyond all human clarification, a world of the spirit, a world to be appeased, to be obeyed, to be supplicated
>
> Joel Rudinger gives us a mythical Sedna true to the harsh Inuit world where she first appeared. The dark shadows of the story remain. The betrayals of her father Ootuk are portrayed in graphic detail, and the scene of him forcing death upon her by repeatedly stabbing her hands until she must succumb to a cold watery grave gains power in its straight-forward folk tale language. The raw, honest language is matched by the primitive simplicity of the silhouette illustrations cut from black paper. The feel of the language and the feel of the illustrations match the feel of the story, and the reader enters for a time this dark mythic level of existence.

> Tired of all of the glossy, commercialized, and cleaned-up versions of folk tales, I was immediately taken by this rich embracement of the deeper levels that such stories are meant to contain.

The story, as are all true myths, is an expression of the deeply ingrained archetypes that support our lives, links between the literal, physical world and the sensed, invisible, spiritual world that gives it meaning. The loss of this connection, this real purpose of the myths is what drove Joel to try and recapture it for a culture that was in the process of denying its validity. Later in his discussion for my book, he wrote:

> There are suggestions that in some Inupiaq communities, Sedna is no longer being credited with being the great mother of the sea mammals, the spiritual being who has for a score of generations given sustenance to hungry Eskimo communities. On a recent National Geographic special, televised on February 5th, 2009, the documentary "Whale Hunters" was shown of a recent subsistence whale capture. After a bowhead whale had been killed and dragged onto the ice near the Alaskan village of Barrow, men, women, and children gathered together to give thanks. As I watched the community gather at the edge of the sea, I waited with anticipation to hear their thanks to Sedna for her bounteous gift. However, that was not what happened. Instead, they all stood at the edge of the ice as the leader proclaimed loudly over the Arctic Ocean, "Thank you, God, for the gift of this whale you have given us. This is for your glory only, in Jesus' name, Amen." As I sat silent in my chair, I asked myself: What will be the future of this wonderful legend? Will the Inuit children of the current generation forget about Sedna and all that she has meant to their culture for thousands of years? Will they never know her story or its meaning? Will she, like Zeus and Athena and Ztlas and Persephone, become a folk legend they descover by accident in a history book or a literature class instead of hearing of her from their fathers? I mention this National Geographic documentary because in its own way it is part of the changing history of the Sedna legend. It has all the same ritual, but the benefactor has changed. Perhaps the greatest variation of a tale is the disintegration and disappearance of that tale. We can only hope that Jesus and Sedna can co-exist within this ancient culture and both keep their separate and distinct cultural presences alive. (p. 63)

All about us the student union clattered with the voices and other noises of a busy student population pulling chairs up to high tables to dig into hamburgers stacked with bacon and tomatoes and lettuce and cheese and mayonnaise and ketchup and mustard and pickles, and french fries drenched in oil and sprinkled with salt, and thick, rich vanilla, strawberry and chocolate malts filled with processed sugar and eggs. Some pulled textbooks and looseleaf notebooks out of their backpacks. Many listened

to music through their earphones. Others talked on cell phones. But we didn't notice.

"I'm pleased you have a passage in your book about the spirit of the village shaman swimming to the bottom of the sea to ask Sedna to send the sacred food animals, hoping she will allow him to comb out her hair in supplication to the worlds of nature and the spirit, a necessary show of respect for the sacred animals that give up their lives that men might survive."

"Yes," Joel replied and smiled.

****

Noreen Parker and I were newly in love, and we had driven down the California coast to visit her former mother-in-law.

Noreen took a drink of her Arnold Palmer, a mixture of lemonade and ice tea. "So, there is a ghost at the Hotel del Coronado?"

"Yes," her former mother-in-law, Jennea, continued.

I sipped my Tangaray Martini. This was interesting. "Please, tell us."

"Well," she continued, "the story goes, a woman registered here . . . I believe it was 1892 . . . sometime in the1890s, as Lottie Bernard. She was alone and apparently ill, but told the front desk not to worry about it, because her brother was a doctor and would be arriving shortly. When asked why she had no luggage, she said she'd been traveling with her brother, but he had to unexpectantly depart the train in Orange, and when he did, he inadvertently took all of the luggage claim checks with him, leaving her no way to retrieve her bags when she checked into the Del.

Later that evening, she told the bell boy she was not feeling well, said she had stomach pains. Today, people suspect she was pregnant. At any rate, the next day, she went to the drugstore, and was obviously in distress."

"And no one helped her?" Noreen asked.

"Apparently some offered, but she refused, claiming her doctor brother would be arriving shortly."

"And her brother?" I prompted.

"Never arrived. Today, most don't believe there was a brother."

"Then what happened?" Noreen asked.

"Well, apparently, she continued to stay in her room, have the bell boy bring her various items, towels, medicine, even whiskey, for a couple of days. I believe he even gave her a sponge bath, not so unusual in those days—at least that's what I've been told."

"Hmmm," I muttered. "The gay-nineties!"

"She mainly kept to herself. Then, a couple evenings after her arrival, after checking with the front desk about any telegrams, she went back to her room. No one took much notice. No one heard anything in the night. But she was discovered the next morning on the steps, dead. There was a large pistol next to her and a pool of blood, and it was pronounced a suicide."

"Did they ever discover what was going on?" I asked.

"No one ever quite figured it out. The best guess is that she was really a woman named Kate Morgan from Iowa, the wife of a gambler named Tom Morgan who had gotten her pregnant and deserted her. But that's just speculation."

"So," Noreen said, "it's *her* ghost that haunts the Del?"

"Yes. A number of guests have reported seeing her ghost. The hotel tried to downplay it, and they changed the room numbers to try and cover it up."

"What does she do?" I asked.

"Well, . . . let's see . . . I guess workers have seen flickering lights in her room, a television turning itself on-and-off, strange breezes, . . . hmm . . . scents, sounds, objects moving . . ., doors opening and closing . . . the usual things that people find with ghosts."

"Do you know of specific sightings?" Noreen asked.

"Well, one couple said they felt someone brush against them in their room and later the blankets were ripped right off of the bed while they were sleeping, and they saw this vague female form at the end of the bed. They were told the next day that they had slept in Kate Morgan's room, and they felt certain she had been with them. . . .

Another time, some lady doctor from Minnesota saw a woman in a "period costume" walking down the stairs toward the ocean, and in the darkness this lady turned and looked directly at her, somehow clearly revealing her face through the night over a fairly lengthy distance. Then, the next morning, she saw a picture of Kate Morgan in a brochure at the hotel gift shop and realized it was the woman she had seen the night before. She was certain she had seen Kate Morgan's ghost. . . . You know, standard ghost stories."

"Interesting," I said. "Are there *many* reports? Common?"

"Well, let's see. . . Jennea took a dainty sip of her Raspberry iced tea before continuing her story. "There was a doorman who reported bringing a couple to the room and finding an indentation of a woman in the bed. He tried to smooth the linens out, but found it impossible. This kind of indentation in the bed has actually been a fairly common experience. And

reports of guests hearing whispers, and the fan getting turned on or off by itself.

"So there are lots of these experiences?" I asked.

"Yes. Many describe her in detail, and they all seem to see the same dark-haired, good-looking woman wearing a long dress from that time, tight fitting, high collar, expensive. Although there are variations. I've heard of some seeing a blonde girl as well." She shrugged her shoulders and took another sip of tea.

It wasn't an overly busy day at the Del. We were sitting in the Ocean Terrace Lounge, and most of the tables were unused. But we could see through the windows to Promenade Deck and the sand beyond, where a number of people were enjoying the sun, playing volleyball, walking along the large rocks, or just lounging in lawn-chairs with umbrellas. Fortunately, we had large fans slowly turning above us to help keep us cool.

The famous Hotel del Coronado. I wondered--is it possible there is a ghost slipping in-and-out of this historic gathering place of the rich and famous?

If I am to believe in ghosts, then I have to believe in things beyond explanation, beyond what logic and science can explain away. I have to enter into that age-old dialogue about existence, about reality and the possibility that there are many realities. What is real? Is reality only the physical world that I experience with my eyes and my ears, my touch and my taste? My smell? Is the world of the dream anything more than random chemical activity in the brain of a homo sapien that needs to revitalize itself in some kind of biological cycle? Do spirits, souls, doppelgangers, angels--supernatural beings of any kind actually exist? Is it possible to experience a *real* miracle? Or is it all just some kind of trick of the mind? Ultimately, I need to ask if God is nothing more than a desperate creation by humans to give life meaning and value.

After my conversation at the Hotel del Coronado, I looked up what I could find about it's famous ghost. And there most certainly was some woman who was shot there and died. Beyond that, it becomes speculation. And Noreen's mother-in-law was correct. There are a lot of sightings. Some of the others include: On February, 2000, a guest who stayed in the haunted room (#3327), wrote: "Kate Morgan woke us both up with her crying—scary, but interesting!" and subsequently reported receiving calls on his pager from number 3327. In 1993, guests in the room reported the television turning itself on and off and its cabinet doors abruptly closing. In October, 1992, Sharon Whitley stayed in the room, and reported an unused towel becoming rumpled and covered with lipstick, lights

flickering, static on the phone line, hearing voices, and a feeling by both her and her friends of someone watching them. Numerous experiences have also been reported in room 3519: Parapsychologist and director of the Office of Scientific Investigation and Research in Los Angeles, Christopher Chacon, used infrared cameras and various other equipment to find 37 abnormalities and designated the room a place of a "classic haunting." In 1992, the *Home Show* filmed a visit and caught an ashtray moving and a glass shattering on tape. In 1883 a Secret Service agent reported loud noise, footsteps, and talking in the room above—only to find out there is no room above. Others have reported unexplained experiences throughout the hotel. Concierge staff have heard muffled conversations and the sounds of a young girl whispering from otherwise empty spaces. One twice saw a "dusty" looking man in late 1940s clothing. A salesperson in the Gift Shop reported books "jumping" off the shelves, a sales sign slammed onto the counter, falling off the wall twice, and another occasion a clock was reported flying off its shelf (in each case, shoppers in the store corroborated the experiences). Another reported postcards and books flying, not falling, but flying off the shelf. In October, 2001, a couple staying in room 3284 reported the television suddenly coming on, changing channels by itself, and seeing six human apparitions dressed in old-fashioned clothes, "all laughing and having a good time." A family staying in room 3343 reported witnessing their mother's strange reflection in the bathroom mirror, her eyes the size of Orphan Annie's and looking like bull's eyes. In 1992, a nine-year-old girl woke up to see a transparent woman in a white nightgown standing near her bed. Another couple reported seeing the ghost of a "beautiful blond girl dressed in layered and tapered cream chiffon," who floated between them in their guestroom.

Those interested in reading up on the Hotel del Coronado and it's ghosts will find the following sources worthwhile: the Heritage Department, Hotel del Coronado, 1500 Orange Avenue, Coronado, CA 92118; the San Diego Historical Society; the San Diego Public Library; the San Diego State University; and Save Our Heritage Organization.

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On December 29, 1987, Janet Lunn posted a letter to me about the ghosts, both fictional and real, that she was living among in her house, the same house that served as the setting for her novel *The Root Cellar*:

> I love this house. I loved peopling it with the ghosts of Rose, Will, Susan, Sam and the rest. They are good company for the other ghosts—most of whom are only footsteps on the stairs—and have settled very comfortably

> here. The house is as I described it in the book. There is, alas, no root cellar. There was once, of course, but with the barns, drive sheds and other out buildings, it has long since disappeared. My husband said often that we would have to either paint one on the surface of the ground behind the house or dig one, as visiting children have been bitterly disappointed. Also, there is no creek running through the back yard. There is the bay, however, not called Hawthorn Bay. It is Pleasant Bay. This whole area was once called Hawthorn Point, which is why I gave the bay that name. Sadly the Hawthorns are almost all gone now. The last of them suffered terribly three winters ago and are hanging on by a few die-hard branches.

Janet and I had been friends for many years, generally visiting with one-another in a café near some literature conference where we were speaking. In 1988, I drove up into Kitchener, Ontario, where she was the current "writer-in-residence," to visit her. And we corresponded, not by emails, by letters during a time before emails would largely replaced them.

We talked about dualities, reflections, the sense of place and how storytellers supply the invisible essence, the heritage of a landscape. Her book, *Shadow in Hawthorne Bay*, was an expression of just this idea, and within it the idea of the *story* being the transmitter, preserver, and even creator of a tradition, a heritage, a culture. Stories, she would say, form a long conversation handed down from one teller to another, from the old ones to the young ones, and stories carry with them the history, the beliefs, and the life blood of a community. In talking specifically about *Shadow in Hawthorne Bay*, she would point out that the stories in Scotland are old and have gone through many storytellers, that the culture is a mature one. However, she would continue, in Canada, the stories are nonexistent or very new, the culture is young, still waiting for the storytellers, the new old ones, to begin the needed story of its vast, rugged landscape and the people who would struggle to make it their home. That is how she concluded *Shadow in Hawthorne Bay*, having Mary kneel over Duncan's grave and talk to him, to his spirit:

> "It is well, Duncan," she said. "And it will be well, for it is meant to be. It is not the same here for me as it was at home—as it was not the same for you. The burns that rush so swiftly down our hillsides are not the creeks that wander through these deep woods. The high hills are not these low lands and the spirits of our rocks and hills and burns, the old ones who dwell in this unseen world, are not here.
>
> But we are not to grieve. The old ones came to our hills in the ancient times. It began somewhere. It began there long ago as it begins here now. We are the old ones here."

PART I:

EMPATHY

Guilt

I found in the caves of the Unconscious demons and were-wolves, strange faces of forgotten gods, and devils, while my mind played unceasingly on everything it remembered of myths and magic. Folds of bedclothes suddenly became the carven image of Baal; a crumpled pillow appeared as the horrible visage of Hecate. I was transported into an atmosphere of miracle and witchcraft, of all-pervading occult forces, although I had taken no interest whatever in these subjects prior to my illness.

—John Custance, *Wisdom, Madness and Folly*

THE SCAPEGOAT

1 Who has believed our report?
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
2 For he shall grow up before him like a tender plant,
and as a root out of dry ground: he hath no form or comeliness;
and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.
3 He was despised and rejected of men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.
and we hide as it were our faces from him;
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
4 Surely he hath borne our griefs,
and carried our sorrows:
yet we did not esteem him,
stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
5 But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
the chastisement of our peace was upon him,
and with his stripes we are healed.
6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the LORD hath laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
he is brought like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb,
so he openeth not his mouth.
8 He was taken from prison and from judgment:
and who shall declare his generation?
for he was cut off out of the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people was he stricken.
9 And he made his grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death;
because he had done no violence,
neither was any deceit in his mouth.
10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him;
he has put him to grief;
when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin,
he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days,
and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand...

11 He shall see of the travail of his soul,
and shall be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many,
for he shall bear their iniquities.
12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he hath poured out his soul unto death;
and he was numbered with the transgressors;
and he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53, *King James Bible* (1)

In *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*, Ursula K. Le Guin presents the reader with a common motif, a community that is festive and happy and without pain or suffering, so long as a few, in this case, one of them lives a life of lonely, horrific torment. (2) She credits the following quote from William James for her inspiration: "If the hypothesis were offered us of a world in which Messrs. Fourier's and Bellamy's and Morris's utopias should all be outdone, and millions be kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torment . . . how hideous a thing would be [the enjoyment of this happiness] when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain." (3) This is the motif of the *scapegoat*, found in such characters as Snowball in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (4), and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice.* (5)

Le Guin concludes her story by adding another dimension to this motif, pointing out that "at times one of the adolescent girls or boys who go to see the child does not go home to weep or rage, does not, in fact, go home at all." Instead some of these adolescents, and later she includes some of the older people as well, simply walk away from Omelas, their exposure to the suffering child making their idyllic world no longer desirable. This cannot help but suggest the exit from the most idyllic world of all, Eden, the garden where Adam and Eve lived without the knowledge of good and evil (or of the dual planes of existence—physical and spiritual), a purely childlike innocence without meaning or value. But when given the chance, the temptation to do so, they *knowingly* bite of the forbidden fruit and gain the knowledge of good and evil. This knowledge of something other than pure joy, pure happiness, and pure festival is the fall from innocence into the world of the adult human, a world where meaning and value and the dual planes of visible and invisible exist.

This *realization and acceptance of the horror* of a world without self-responsibility, without ethical sensitivity, without meaning and value is the added silence between the words that touches the reader with the

knowledge of both the sorrow and nobility of human existence. “These people go out into the street, and walk down the street alone. They keep walking, and walk straight out of the city of Omelas, through the beautiful gates. They keep walking across the farmlands of Omelas. Each one goes alone, youth or girl, man or woman. Night falls; the traveler must pass down village streets, between the houses with yellow-lit windows, and on out into the darkness of the fields.” This indeed is the human journey out of the sunlit world of childhood into the dark, shadowy world of the adult, a world that includes the ultimate unknown darkness of death and the knowledge of our own ignorance. “Each alone, they go west or north, towards the mountains. They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all.” And we all walk with them, at least those of us who have the courage to face the human condition. And what do they or we know about this place they and we walk toward? According to Le Guin, “It is possible that it does not exist.” Nonetheless, there is a strange comfort in the concluding sentence, “But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas.”

William James’ point in the passage that inspired Ursula La Guin to write *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* is not just that there is an ethical dimension to the concept of a *scapegoat* but that the *natural* negative response to such a situation is *inborn*, is *innate*. This raises some interesting possibilities in terms of the original humans as represented in the Garden of Eden in *Genesis*. (6) Were they created with *innate* ethical sensitivity? The story suggests that they were not, yet they knew it was *wrong* to disobey God before they disobeyed. Or did they? Maybe it was simply a matter of knowing they would be *punished*, a form of power ethics, which really is no ethics at all, as it is driven by the *instinct* for self-preservation or gratification (depending which side of the equation one is on), common to all living things, and does not involve anything beyond mere physical existence, is actually a denial of meaning and value. If not born or, rather, created with ethical sensitivity, then perhaps Adam and Eve were created with the capacity for it, with some innate ethical organ or brain potential that just needed something to initiate it, to spark it. If so, it is curious that it is Satan who is responsible for this initiation of ethical sensitivity. And God condemns it and condemns humans to lives of hardship and temporality for gaining it. It is also worth noting that ethical existence is gained as the result of curiosity and disobedience (taking on *self-responsibility*—even though both Adam and Eve do try to blame Satan in his guise as the tempter, the snake).

What about a scientific model? The best science has come up with are the ever-changing interpretations of Darwin's theory of evolution, a theory that suggests human ancestry goes back through a chain of mutations or evolutions from some form or forms of pre-human existence. (7) Most paleontologists and archeologists believe that the evolutionary biting of the forbidden fruit occurs, not with the creation of crude tools or weapons (these are meant for their practical, literal value), but with *cave wall paintings*, thus exhibiting a belief in the *invisible world of the mind*, a form of thinking and knowing beyond mere literal, practical existence, for these paintings cannot literally have a practical purpose. Furthermore, it is likely that they were more than mere decoration, especially since they are high on the walls and ceilings of caves that would have had no natural light. They are, in fact, paintings that would have been extremely difficult to execute—needing both some kind of platform to stand on and some kind of lighting, a fire, involving both danger and work for no practical purpose, unless there is a belief that there is some kind of other reality, an invisible reality that interacts with and influences the visible reality. In other words, if the paintings were merely meant to be pretty or some kind of casual doodling, there would be no point in creating them in such an unfriendly environment. The dark, mysterious, underground environment, then, must have suggested feelings of forces beyond the corporeal, sunlit world above ground, and it is very likely the paintings were understood as a means of having influence on the physical world, a means of contacting, of supplicating, satisfying, perhaps worshipping spiritual forces, forces beyond phenomenal existence, most likely meant to help with and justify the killing and eating of the wild beasts they depict. And this assumption is further justified because many of them have been traced over multiple times, suggesting a ritualistic repetition, and the main scenes are of hunting.

France is the landscape. The first to emerge is Altamira. In the 1860s, a poacher on the estate of Senor Don Marcelino Santiago Tomas Sanz de Sautuola followed his dog, which had gotten lost in pursuit of a wounded fox, into a small hole. Within it stretched the huge, painted caves of *the beginnings of human consciousness*. There was no immediate rush to explore and unravel this hidden world. However, a few years later Don Marcelino was made aware of the caves and decided to play at archeology and geology. After having the entrance enlarged, he was able to recover some bone fragments of long extinct animals, which he showed to his friend, Vilanova y Piera, Professor of Geology at the University of Madrid, who confirmed that the bones were from the European Stone Age, and had been split by prehistoric man to extract their marrow.