

IN THE LESSENING

H. KIRK RAINER



HOME INDUSTRY

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*I am of the opinion that my life
belongs to the whole community and
as long as I live, it is my
privilege to do for it whatever
I can. I want to be thoroughly
used up when I die, for the harder
I work the more I live.*

- George Bernard Shaw

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IN THE LESSENING

IN THE PREFACE (of the developing story)

Inside you

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

- Maya Angelou

The inspiration for this story comes from a variety of sources. First, there is the laden talents of an uncle; one that has the gift of storytelling, as I offer this an example or account.

“...then there was the fellow they called ‘Booger’.”

Booger I thought, as he continued.

“I don’t know how he got the name, but he had lots of red and brown hair. I guess what I’m trying to say is that he kind of looks like a booger.”



“Okay,” and at that point my mind began to imagine a man fitting that description along with the demeanor of such a pet name.

He continued with his story: “We took the tunnel, on account that it was raining. When the weather was bad, we took the tunnel.”

The tunnel evidently connected buildings where he worked.

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"Nobody every came down there, so when Booger smelled something coming from there, he said to me: 'Do you know what that smell is?'"

"I didn't know...but Booger said it was weed."

A great storyteller, my uncle can take the most trivial and turn it into something that is magical, even mesmerizing. And though our contact has been sporadic in my adulthood, I remain his captive audience—if just to relive or even reclaim my childhood for the moment.

[The one] who tells secrets or stories must think of who is hearing or reading, for a story has as many versions as it has readers. Everyone takes what he wants or can from it and thus changes it to his measure.¹

As to the (other) inspirations and influences; well, they're probably more than I can consider here or at anytime; but predominate is my interest in (and following of) what I consider to be radical changes occurring in our society and culture.

The changes are as broad as the universe and as small as that which is within me; and without elaborating, these changes are affecting life and living in a profound and even permanent way. These "changes" have influenced my writing in general and this story in particular.

Then there is the intended audience; those that are not just interested in these "changes", but also in the possible consequences on life and living.

¹ John Steinbeck, *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

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My goals are to create a story that is magical, memorable and even mesmerizing (in moments), if that is possible. These goals will be achieved (or attempted) through the effort of finding goodness in the worst of times; in a setting described as dystopian:

A time and place of much loss, darkness and deprivation; it is “the lessening” and lowering of lifestyle, the standard of living.²

How do you find good in the bad, light in darkness? It may not be easy or simple, but I believe what makes the difference or matters most is: hope, life, and love.

With this belief comes a story and setting that offers what matters most through the characters, this time and place of community. These characters and community are not simply a group of people who live in the same area, or have similar interests.³ Here, they are more like a commune where the characters live together and share responsibilities, possessions, and what is necessary to survive, experience life and living.

² Dystopian (opposite of utopian) settings are found in a multitude of books or films, read or viewed: *1984*(1949); *Fahrenheit 451*(1966); *Sleeper*(1973); *Planet of the Apes*(multiple years); *They Live* (1988); *Children of Men*(2006); *The Road*(2009); and *Atlas Shrugged*(2011). Others of which I am familiar: *Brave New World*(1932); *Metropolis*(1927); *Blade-Runner*(1982), *Running Man*(1987), *Goodnight World*(2013).

³ Merriam-Webster provides a basic definition of community.

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To survive is a very real objective. It is certainly about another day: the rising of the sun, the coming of another morning with its natural light; but is also about life and living in THE WAY.

THE WAY is supernatural; it is what makes the heart glow when love is given, life is renewed, and hope is restored. THE WAY may come in the most unexpected or unimaginable circumstance—arising or appearing from nowhere, but then illuminating every thing. It illuminates with THE LIGHT, not only space (so as to see) but also a subject or a situation (so as to understand). THE LIGHT is powerful, and in its full glory “nothing can dim THE LIGHT which shines from within.”⁴

I hope that you seek, and then begin to find THE LIGHT; and if and when you do,

May it [prove] to be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out.⁵

⁴ Maya Angelou.

⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

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IN THE PRELUDE (of the coming lessening)

The system will not

The system will not simply go on, divorced from its founding roots. As the drift will tend to be the same, no matter what political party is voted in. When the principles are gone, there remains only expediency at any price.

- Francis Schaeffer, *How then shall we live?*

How did we get there (to this period called THE LESSENING); or said another way, what is the back-story?

The answer (the back-story) can be described as a series of events and phases (or a process) that incrementally—or even catastrophically—brought “the system” (or systems) to eventual failure.⁶

One way to think about this process is with an illustration of a mechanical gear or cog: a single flaw becomes critical in operation...leading or leading to degradation and eventual failure. But not just failure of the single component or gear; for in operation, a mechanism or system is then exposed to further damage and disabling—as one event leads to (or



⁶ The term “the system” is used here to represent all that is vital to the operation of a society, described as: historical, economic-fiscal, political, environmental, social and spiritual.

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causes) another at an accelerated rate of dysfunction and destruction. One flaw in operation leads to catastrophic, even disintegration of the part, failure of the system; a commonly called chain reaction or domino effect.

THE LESSENING was the result of series of events and phases; moments and periods of degradation and failures—whether planned-engineered, or unavoidable, that occurred at an accelerated rate eventually causing collapse.

A brief description of these events and phases, including causes, should strike a cord for anyone who has their eyes open to our own nation-state as it is:

Continued external conflict and contention;
political-economic expansion, meddling in foreign
affairs, and other hegemonic-type activities

Accelerated growth in arrests and incarceration;
obscure-voluminous law, progressive power transfer
to private interests, institutions and the State

Escalated security-surveillance and reporting;
endless conflict causes retaliation and revenge—
the consequence of foreign intervention, *blowback*⁷

Curtailed protests/heightened controls; state
power perpetuates despotism; which breeds despair,
despondency, defiance, and dissent

⁷ *Blowback* is described as unintended consequences of a covert operation that are suffered by the aggressor.

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Sustained unemployment and underemployment;
systemic de-industrialization, illegal
immigration, taxation-regulation on manufacturing
and export

Lowered living standard, income and wealth;
deflation of currency and other long-term
developments as described previously

Forced population-demographics; expropriation,
infrastructure and urban decay, repossession and
taxation against budgetary issues

Reduced birthrates, fertility and reproduction;
scientific and philosophical means and methods for
selective breeding, sterilization and termination

Eroded individual freedoms and social power; long-
term policy and planning devalued and destroyed
conventional marriage and family while advancing
alternatives.

Within and beyond these events and phases came one or
more natural and manmade crisis/catastrophes,
resulting in a declared or determined collapse.⁸
Gradually, a regional recovery and restoration began;
but unfortunately few if any lessons were seemingly
learned or later applied.

At the time and place of this story, the restoration
has manifested into a society described as dystopian;

⁸ This (these) crisis are purposely **not** detailed; but
assume that each and all were of such depth and degree as
to be devastating.

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where the vast majority of the population lives in concentrated urban centers/settings called METROPOLIS or METRO⁹ with control and containment instituted to all existence.¹⁰

Ensuring this societal control and containment is a system of extremes in law and order. Law or POLITIC¹¹ and order MATI¹² is complex and Draconian (in comparison with natural, communal or common law).¹³

And all that remains of relative freedom is COMMUNITY; a hodgepodge of peoples that somehow survived in the outlying areas of METRO, COMMUNITY has eked-out life and living through the adoption and practice of ancient, agrarian practices and the individual and communal effort of avoiding or averting the power of POLITIC and MATI.

⁹ METROPOLIS is a name-description inspired by a classic film (1927) of the same name; it was set in a futuristic urban dystopia.

¹⁰ The description of "control and containment" suggests more than structure but a cast system of primarily proletariats bound to their roles and regiment.

¹¹ POLITIC is a continuation on the format and theme of METROPOLIS; it is derived from Greco-Roman history and is presented-promoted as sacred, holy writ.

¹² MATI is similarly derived (as POLITIC); it is translated and proven as the "evil eye" though presented-promoted as "the all seeing and merciful eye".

¹³ Natural and common law is used liberally to develop context; whereas natural or common law might be reasoned for the common good, POLITIC and MATI ultimately serve a relative few.

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IN THE AFTERMATH (of an alleged accident)

Live and learn as if

Live as if you were to die tomorrow.
Learn as if you were to live forever.

- Gandhi

“He’s coming to,” I could faintly hear.

“I wasn’t sure this one would make it at first, but it seems so,” said another.

As my view came into focus, I could make-out the image of two.

“Keep me informed,” the one asks.

“Of course I will, Caleb,” continued the other.

“Who are you? Where am I? How did—,” I uttered.

“You have been through much—but the worst is most-likely behind you,” I was reassured.

“Your shuttle derailed. You’re safe now,” I was told. I could see an aged, weathered face, with shoulder length hair and heavy beard. Not the sort of face that I was use to—at least not in my recollection.

“Yes, I remember the shuttle; the explosion and—”

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I was barely ten minutes into the half-hour commute from METRO when it happened; an explosion and then.... “Where are we? Who are you,” I ask.

“My name is Salvador.”

He explained that I was rescued from the wreckage and brought to this place called community.

“What’s community?” I had heard of such, but never seriously considered that anyone could actually live beyond METRO.

“Let’s talk about your condition,” Salvador said with care. As I listened, he explained in detail, offering suggestions on treating my wounds and head trauma. “You need to rest and give healing a chance.”



Give healing a chance, I wondered. *What does he mean by that?*

“Is there anything else,” Salvador asks.

“No, I don’t think so,” I said, still confused.

In the weeks to come, healing did have a chance—more than a chance, as I reflect on my progress and what happened. Salvador continued to care for me. He was what I would later call “my savior”; not because of my recovery from injuries, but because of what he did to give healing a real chance. The other man’s name was Caleb; and like “Sal”, he had a peace about him.

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They were leaders, but they were followers too. These two were part of this place that had somehow carved-out what they called “life and living”. They were among a relatively small population who refused to live by POLITIC. Only a relative few made it, I was told. Most had been disbanded and destroyed.

“How are you feeling, Bart?” came the now-familiar voice of Caleb.

Like others here, Cal had the markings of a primitive life; adequately clothed I suppose, but assorted attire branded as what use to be sarcastically called bobo.¹⁴

“Better, much better; but I need—”

“To get home,” Cal interrupted.

“POLITIC is looking for me; I am sure they know of my location. This is dangerous for you.”

“Yes, they can be a problem but I doubt they’ve located you. The eyes don’t, can’t look here.”

“You mean MATI, don’t you?” *He was right*, I thought. *Several days had passed; more than enough time. I would have been discovered by now...if MATI was active.*

“Well, that explains why I haven’t been rescued.”

“Rescued,” he said. “Hunted-down is more like it.”

¹⁴ The term “bobo” is slang for bourgeois.

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IN THE AFTERMATH (of an alleged accident)

The way of

For such is the way of it: to find and
lose...for your loss you suffer of your own
free-will, and you might have chosen otherwise.

- J.R.R. Tolkien

Awakened abruptly from a fascinating dream, I heard a familiar voice. "Cal, we think a shuttle has derailed; two kilometers." Still in slumber, I mumbled: "Go Sal."

Reflecting momentarily on the dream; how COMMUNITY was developed—a journey of that I would have never conceived, even now. "But back to reality," I murmured, as I crawled out of my shanty.

More information was delivered: an explosion had occurred at the derailment, but without any determined cause or extent of damages. The team had recovered only one.



"Sal, what's the situation," I ask, shortly after the team's return.

"We recovered only one...could not continue—"

"Yes, I heard and understand," I interrupted.

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"We tried to consider every option," he stuttered.
"The bodies, death...."

"Sal, take it easy; it's alright. You did what you could do."

Sal gathered his emotions and then went on to explain that the shuttle was in sections, scattered and smoldering. "And the scene; I thought of, and the—"

"I know, I would have too, but you saved one. How is he?"

Sal replied, "His vital signs are stable: he's lost some blood; no indication of fractures, but just abrasions and cuts."

"Is he conscious, awake. Can I see him?"

"He is resting right now."

I was both grieved and grateful by the news; it was good if just to save one.

Several hours went by before Sal returned to tell me, "Cal, he is awake, ready."

"Do you have a name, any information?"

"His given name is Bartimaeus; that's all I have."

"Good, let's see him," and leaving my shanty, we walked to the infirmary.

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“How are you feeling? It is Bartimaeus?”

Bartimaeus, or “Bart” as he preferred, was brief; a few words and nothing more. *But what should I expect given his condition; all that he’s been through?*

“Think of what he might be feeling, Cal.”

“You think he’s holding back,” I ask.

“Wouldn’t you; I mean, he arrives in a time and place he knows nothing about?”

Sal was right. METRO is a different world; it is a different time and place. “How much does he know?”

“We haven’t talked in that detail yet, but the time will come, I believe,” Sal said, pausing for some response.

“What do you think, Cal?”

How often I ask myself, “What do I think?”

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IN THE AFTERMATH (of an alleged accident)

Ready or not

Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

But the multiple explosions that echoed through the wood were distinctly machinery moving with enormous energy. Like a beast, it roared for a moment, then screamed and then, silence. Only nature could be heard now, followed by the rustling of COMMUNITY. *No time to think about it, Got to move on it!* Grabbing my gear, I rushed to our gathering area. “Guys, make ready; we’re headed to the rail.” And turning from them, I ran back to check-in with Cal before pulling out.

Stealthy, in a linear, spaced pattern, we made the way to the location of the explosion. At another point (about a hundred meters from the area of the wreckage), I spoke: “Okay, we’re clear of the eyes; quickly fan-out and look for survivors. But be careful: the shuttle’s crew may still be alive.”



As they quickly moved, one following another, I began to sense the depth of destruction. *It would be a miracle if anyone survived*, I thought.

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What could be seen in the early morn was cause to think it was more than a derailment. The task was clear however: if the body was intact and appeared to be savable, prepare them for transport. We had five gurneys and the team of ten. We would do all we could.

As we assessed the site, my earlier thoughts were coming to reality; the scene was morbid.

I heard others expressing their own sense of the situation; one of team, vomiting at the horrid sight, turned to me with the most striking gaze.

“Sal, its looks like—“

“I know, I know; they’re all gone,” I whispered solemnly. And for a moment, we stood there; silent in our shock and sorrow.

Then, out of the silence, there was a moan; a gasp. And in seconds, we were on it. But as we tried to administer aid, one of the team signaled that the eyes were upon us, and closing-in quickly. “Alright; get him on the gurney.” And backtracking, we moved quickly.

After some time, I reported to Cal: “He’s coming to.”

“I wasn’t sure he’d make it at first, but it seems like he is, he will,” replied Caleb.

“Easy friend, you’ve been through much,” I explained, “but the worst is most-likely behind you.”

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“Ah, ‘much’”, he struggled to say.

“The shuttle derailed; an explosion,” I explained.

After a moment, he blurted-out: “Yes, I remember now.”

I went on to tell him my name and where he was. I then told him about his injuries; and how we were treating them. “You need to rest and give healing a chance.”

Over the weeks to come, we continued to care for him. Along with the healing of surface injuries came a marked difference. Granted, we did not know him before—and nor did he know of us—but his words and feelings gave reason to believe that healing was much deeper and more profound than even I could have imagined or thought possible.

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IN THE AFTERMATH (of an alleged accident)

Who is content with

He is richest who is content with the least,
for content is the wealth of nature.

- Socrates

As the days passed, I began to realize my surroundings: a community outside of METRO, deep in the wood, but several kilometers from the shuttle line.

“Good morning Bart, how about a walk?”

“Very well,” I said, as I gradually lifted myself from the ground. I had seen this person before, but did not know her name; but just the same, I was ready to branch-out and see what lied beyond the confines of my care. *Who are these people? How do they live the way they do?*

COMMUNITY was bustling with activity; and though still recovering, I welcomed such an atmosphere and attitude: people stopping to see me—and even speak—as they seemed to be aware of who I was or, at least where I came from. *Is it possible, a place like this?*

“Did you have any questions,” she continued.

“Yes, to begin, who are you?”

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She told me her name, Abigail; and went further to explain more about COMMUNITY. “We try to live by a promise: ‘always place the interest of others before your own and your interest will always be taken care of.’”¹⁵

Giving this promise little thought at the time, I would come to appreciate just how important it was, and would be.

“What is that sweet fragrance?”

“It’s honeysuckle,”



“That’s honeysuckle; what a smell....”

“Here, try sucking on the stem; like this,” as she reached out to hand me a stem.

As I took a flower from her hand, my attention was on her.

“Beautiful,” I remarked

The plant was harvested for several things; the vine for rope, the flower or nectar as sweetener, and the plant itself to lure bees for pollination of food-producing plants.

“Check-out this rope,” she said, handing it to me.

¹⁵ Provided by Mark Spann recollecting his father, James Spann Sr.

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It was strong, pliable; a bit more course, but seemingly as durable as the fibers I was familiar with.

Discovering this natural product reminded me of reading about Cannabis; once prevalent in this region, it had a variety of uses.

"This reminds me of Cannabis," I said with curiosity.

"Yes, we have that too," she remarked.

She continued, as before, to explain the uses. "The seed and oil are used to stave-off skin irritations."

"I could think of other uses," I said.

"As a pain killer, you mean?"

"Exactly," I exclaimed.

At the root of the planting was good soil and compost.

"So much for the pleasant smell," I quipped.

"It's not so bad. You'll get use to it."

"I hope not," I said, half-serious.

As I would learn over time, Abigail grew-up on a farm; a place that her original family owned and operated. This life and living seem to come natural to her.

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Feeling the effect of my recovery, I could not continue our walk. "I am going to have to go back."

"Back to METRO," she asked with a look of concern.

"No, I mean back to my shanty." And as I returned, the sun was setting, and with darkness coming, the now familiar smell of fires would fill the air. And if that wasn't enough to entertain my senses, there was singing. *When was the last time I heard this sound.*

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE AFTERMATH (of an alleged accident)

Reality of

You can avoid reality, but you cannot avoid the consequences of avoiding reality.

- Ayn Rand

Okay, I can do this, I thought, as I walked toward the survivor. "Good morning Bart, how about going for a walk?"

With some expected difficulty, he stood up and said, "Sure."

Too bad, I thought, *I was hoping he would turn me down*. But as it was, this was the beginning of what would be a series of such walks.

"What is your name?"

"It's Abigail," I replied, "just Abby." And that was all I could say in the moment. *I just hope he doesn't ask a lot of questions or expect too much.*

"What is that sweet fragrance," he asks.

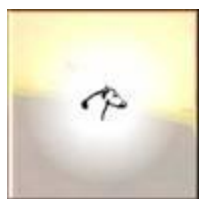
"It's honeysuckle."

So I explained; not just of honeysuckle, but of all other things he asks about.

"What's your favorite animal," Bart asks me.

"It is the horse."

"The horse," he repeated.



"Yes, we had horses; several breeds for work and show."

"We," he replied.

"Yes, my family...on the farm."

"What is 'family'?"

"You know, folks; father, mother and so on."

He still looked puzzled.

"I've seen a few pictures of horse; a fascinating creature."

"Yes, they were," giving some attention to the extinction.

Similar questions followed until I noticed that he seems to tiring. "Are you alright?"

"Hey, I'm as fit as a race—"

"Fit as a race horse, you say. Then you won't mind hay or oats?"

"Sure, I'll try anything."

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Horses had a place in my heart; but in this “place” was also much pain. So the subject and conversation was not always pleasant. Though I could not speak about it to this stranger, I had accepted that we were all survivors; something we all understood without pictures or presumptions.

“Now that’s a fragrance.”

“That’s compost,” I remarked, realizing the humor.

“Abigail, I am going to have to go back; still not up to it.”

“Of course, I understand.”

And as we walked back, I could hear the children singing a familiar spiritual:

As I went down in the river to pray
Studying about that good old way
(And who shall wear) the starry crown
Good Lord, show me THE WAY.

“Voices of children,” Bart remarked. “That’s a new one.”

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IN THE AFTERMATH (of an alleged accident)

You remember what

What you remember saves you.

- W.S. Merwin

As the days rolled into weeks, my walks took me deeper into the lives of COMMUNITY and surrounding area. And by “deeper”, I mean a basic sense of belonging—far beyond what I could have imagined or experienced before.

“How is the healing going,” Cal asks.

“My strength is returning. But on the mental side, my mind is drifting to places unknown.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been having these dreams for one thing”, as I began.

“Let me guess,” he said: “Strange dreams and thoughts; memories possibly...?”

“How did you know?”

“The eyes are not watching,” Cal began. The eyes prevail over thoughts and feelings, he explained, robbing the individual of imagination; ideas that could be threatening.

"Threatening," I ask as more of a statement.

"Let's save that one for later. As it is, you will continue to dream, your mind will continue to drift to places not known or recollected. You will daydream too," Cal continued. In his advice, I remembered something; maybe another vague memory:

All men dream, but not equally.

Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes, to make them possible.¹⁶

But the dreamers of the day are dangerous men; they act on their dreams to make them possible.

Walks included foraging; collecting of anything that might be usable or functional. At the same, information would be exchanged with other communities—verbal and written information that enabled some level of coordination, one to the other.

Written information was "dispatched" by younger people, fit to be run. Among those I met was Phil, or as he offered his formal name, "Philippides".¹⁷

"It's the gazelle," I quipped.

And with some heavy breathing, he replied, "Yes, I am swift and graceful."

¹⁶ T. E. Lawrence.

¹⁷ Philippides was the name of the first recorded hero of Ancient Greece who was the inspiration for a modern sporting event, the marathon. For more information, see Wikipedia: "Pheidippides".

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“So I heard,” I said, “But what about the deer skin?”

Phil explained that messengers would carry deerskins as a potential disguise against thermal photography. Some of the outlying areas had so-called “hotspots” where detection was common.

“They’re sometimes effective,” he replied.

“I am only a little familiar with this—”

“The technology or the disguises,” he asked with particular interest.

“Well, both,” I replied. “What I mean is that, for some reason, I seem to recall hunting...with, camouflage.” And before I realized it, I was explaining a hunting excursion from my boyhood—and of all things—with a father I never thought I had or knew. *Well, here I go again, undoing the unimaginable.*



Changing the subject slightly, I ask, “Why are the routes and runners of any concern, to METRO?”

“Because they consider us a threat,” he said firmly.

But as to “they”, I had yet to fully understand who he was talking about. It could be “the eyes” or something or someone else.

How these people maintain such a harmonious climate was beyond me; for in and through THE LESSENING was every apparent reason to give-up or give-in.

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“Well, I am off again,” Phil declared.

“Where are you going this time?”

“Out there,” Phil said with a bit of satire, “to run fast.”

Yes, fast; run fast and furious.

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IN THE AFTERMATH (of an alleged accident)

Dream and

Sail away from the safe harbor.
Catch the trade winds in your sails.
Explore. Dream [and] Discover.

- Mark Twain

I continued to check-up on Bart's progress, while trying to learn more about him.

"How are you," I ask him.

Overall, he seemed less defensive. More discussion of the dreaming followed. "It is not what I imagined; but then again, an imagination is not something I'm use to." He described his dreaming of unusual things; things that could have happened in his earlier life, but at the same, may have never happened at all.

"This condition of deep reflection is common," I told him; it is part of the journey of healing that ideally comes.

I am glad that he is taking this journey—or that it is taking him.

Bart continued, "I thought I remembered my father; we were hunting together."

"What was your father's name?"

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"I don't know. You see, I never remembered having a father—I never knew him," Bart said.

"And you're sure of that?"

"I'm not sure of anything. My imagination seems to have taken-over, leaving me in doubt about everything to this day. Tell me, are you real or am I imagining that too."

"Your mind is being freed," I replied, "The eyes—the evil eyes—overpower thoughts and feelings, robbing the individual of free thought. "All men dream but not equally," I continued, citing the words of the English author, Lawrence. "That came from a man named Lawrence, who was from what we know as Britannia; he was a soldier, explorer and writer."



I explained that Lawrence knew of ancient "dictates or obligations"; he spent time in Arabia. "In Arabia, at a time of war, Lawrence said":

We lived always in the stretch or sag of nerves;
Either in the crest or in the trough of waves of feelings;

Blood was always on our hands—we were licensed to it;

We lived for the day and died for it.

[Our] duty and obligation were obvious, so too was a strong, personal will; a conviction, a constitution that shined its light, at times, through the doldrums of decorum and its duty.

IN THE LESSENING

“Lawrence knew THE WORD.”¹⁸ But why do I bother to mention this man; to describe the life of one who lived long ago in a time for which we know little—and for a character whose life and living was thought to be unsolvable?

“This I did; I meant to make a new nation, to restore a lost influence.”¹⁹

“He wrote of his travels:”

Today and in this very moment, this mystic and his life is on my mind—for inexplicable reason or cause. This I can tell you however: my mind sails away to such distant and disturbing places, though I can not determine if ever explored or even known.

And out of my pocket, I pulled a pamphlet and read:

We were fond together because of the sweep of open places, the taste of wide winds, the sunlight, and the hopes in which we worked...

We were wrought up with ideas inexpressible and vaporous, but to be fought for.

We lived many lives in those whirling campaigns, never sparing ourselves: yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took our victory to remake in the likeness of the former world they knew.

¹⁸ THE WORD: ancient Greek and Hebrew literature.

¹⁹ The material in this passage comes from You-Tube, “T. E. Lawrence and Arabia, BBC documentary”.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE AFTERMATH (of an alleged accident)

When I run, I feel

God made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure.

- Eric Liddell

Our training began early, but it was necessary; it is essential that we have endurance like the Greeks of long ago. “Philippides, it is the way to survive another day,” they would say, again and again.

And so I did as I was told to do. I did this because I could, because I should, and because MY MAKER²⁰ made me fast. And as I matured, my training gave way to travel; first with a team, two or more; then finally, alone with only the provisions on my back and the persistence to pass the mark and than another and finally, the finish line.

“It’s you again; the gazelle,” I heard a voice.

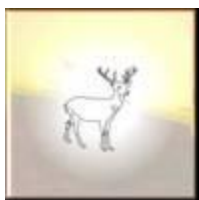
I barked out, “Yes, I am swift and graceful,” then added, “And what are you?” But as he spoke, I realized that he was not one of us; but instead, had the signs of a PRO²¹ among METRO.

²⁰ MY MAKER: a spiritual being, creature all of things, including the person, their features and abilities.

²¹ PRO: a proletariat; an essential worker.

IN THE LESSENING

And with no immediate reply from the PRO, I continued: "I am a runner: a fugitive of freedom with a message marked²² with MY MAKER'S blood; but you're right: I am a 'gazelle' too".



"What's with the animal fur?"

"It's fur to fool your folks," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"When I wear it, I feel more like a gazelle. At times, I might stop to graze, sharpen my horns—that sort of thing. Sounds fun doesn't it," I ask have heartedly.

"It could be," the PRO said, with difficulty.

"Give it time; a few more weeks of hiding and you'll be like a mole: tunneling under ground," I told him.

"Actually, I've done that; it was my call."

"Is that what they had you doing," I remarked. "It make's sense if you live beneath...."

"Tell me. What's it's like out there, in the wood all alone," he ask, no getting to a point of discussion.

"Well..." and now I was doing the delaying.

²² A marked message formalized the dispatch. Phil is using the term "MY MAKER'S blood" to suggest great sacrifice and worthiness.

IN THE LESSENING

“It depends on time and place, more or less: being in a high-risk place at the wrong time can be a real cat & mouse event.”

“It’s MATI, right,” he asks, apparently having been familiarized with this surveillance.

“I’m not sure that the evil eye is always the threat, but it certainly can make for a bad day.”

“What is ‘a bad day’,” he continued.

“A bad day is when I spend more time wrestling with fear than resting in the love of COMMUNITY.”

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

A lie gets

A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.

- Sir Winston Churchill

"Here are the dispatches," I said, handing Cal the bundle.

"Good, but please stay, we need to talk."

Cal poured through the dispatches, unexpressive of the content. Naturally, I wondered what he might be thinking—what we needed to talk about. And after a few minutes, he said: "Phil, the information that we receive is sometimes sketchy, misleading."

"Do you mean falsified?"

"I mean that the information has been unreliable, ranging for highly inaccurate to downright lies," he said with a pause. "I am not holding you responsible, of course, but I think that it's good for you to be aware," Cal continued. "But as to my own ability to discern fact from fiction, such a process takes more than one set of eyes."

"So what are you suggesting," I replied.

Caleb continued, "The cost of receiving and reacting to bad information is not only intolerable, but it is

avoidable. If some measures are put in place, we can do this—and by ‘we’ I mean all of COMMUNITY, hear and there.”

“What do you think, Phil?”

“I can appreciate the problem. Some of costs have been borne among the dispatchers, of course.”

“Yes, and we do have our enemies, don’t we?”

“We do—not that we want them,” I agreed.

“You know Phil, that if you have ‘enemies, then that means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life’.”²³

“Right; standing for something is a good thing,” I replied.

“I know exactly what you mean; and I want you to know that your costs and sacrifices are realized whether you think so or not.” Pausing for a moment, Cal added: “I was a runner too.”

“I didn’t know that,” I said.

“Yes, I did my duty during the days of the empire—before the collapse,” he explained.

“What that must have been like; I mean, living in the last days of the empire,” I said as more a statement than a question.

²³ Winston Churchill.

“Yes, it was uncertain and chaotic, like watching a behemoth writhing in its last moment; still powerful and dangerous...until its last gasp,” Cal added.

“A behemoth; you mean, as something of a giant beast?”

“It was leader of long ago that said of empire”:
Empires of the future are the empires of the mind.²⁴

“Could he have been right,” Cal aired his thought.

“Hard to say”, a voice came from behind us.

“How timely,” Cal responded.

“Phil, this is Ben,” Cal said as we embraced.

“Ben is obviously young, but has a real good head on his shoulders—like you. He has become my right hand; someone I can trust and rely on to help with the dispatches.”

“What are your thoughts on this...Churchill,” I asked.



Ben seemed to choose his words carefully, methodically; a manner that made me wonder about him, but even so, his response made me realize why he was Cal’s “right hand”.

²⁴ Winston Churchill.

IN THE LESSENING

Looking toward the ground, Ben responded:

A man does what he must in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures; it is the basis of all human morality.²⁵

“How do we do what we must do,” Cal asks.

“It is like running”, I replied, “you practice and prepare; then you put one leg in front of the other and press-on for the prize. Everyone runs in their own way.”

“And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end?

“From within,”²⁶ Ben answered.

“Yes, from THE LIGHT,” Caleb added.

²⁵ Winston Churchill.

²⁶ *Chariots of Fire*, spoken by Eric Liddell in a crowd of patrons following a race.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

A race between

Human history becomes more and more a race
between education and catastrophe.

- H. G. Wells

How true, I thought, reading *The Sleeper Wakes*.²⁷

“He knew truth,” I murmured. “If I only—”

“Cal, here are the dispatches you were waiting on,”
Phil said as he handed me the bundle.

Reluctantly putting down the novel, I took the
dispatches. “Thanks Phil. Please stay.”

Boy, could I use Wells’ insight, I thought as I began
to examine the contents. *So much information; but is
it good, is it true?*

“It’s sketchy,” I murmured.

Phil nodded, agreeing that the dispatches were in
doubt.

²⁷ *The Sleeper Wakes*: first published in 1910, a dystopian
novel by H. G. Wells about a man who sleeps for two
hundred years before waking up in a completely transformed
London. The plot was loosely adapted to the Woody Allen
film, “*Sleeper*”, in which a health food store owner from
the 1970’s is awakened from 200 years of cryogenic
freezing.

IN THE LESSENING

"It's a real tangle. But somehow, we've got to wade through it; find the flaws—get to the root of it," I began to explain.

"This is a lot to ask; to take on more risks. We have to be reasonable, but I can't rationalize our runners putting their lives on the line for this. We can do better...."



"Who is behind this? Who is at fault," Phil asks, apparently angered.

"That's a key question, but I don't have an immediate answer. As it is, the problem affects us all; it's a COMMUNITY problem: things that have to work in synchrony are obviously not...."

"So, if one thing goes wrong, the consequences affect us all," Phil asks, summarizing my comments. "You mean just one thing—only one?"

"Yes, one thing leads to another; a domino effect; and in the end, what we have is a tangle. A simple problem has a simple solution, but this is not a simple problem," I continued.

"So if improve on my speed, the problem is still not solved," Phil ask with a sarcastic tone.

"Right; flaws at a faster pace," I said, entertaining his question, playing on the sarcasm.

"So there is no simple solution. We can't just change one thing and expect the dispatches to be clean," Phil reiterated.

"That's right; a problem of multiple persons or personalities, it will require help from all around."

"That shouldn't be a challenge. I am getting a similar sentiment from the others. Matt eluded to it the other day--and he just one of several," Phil explained.

"Yes, I have getting similar vibes, I concurred. "Enough is enough; time to action!"

No one could deny or dispute that we faced unbelievable odds; these odds might be considered like the ancient story, "David versus Goliath": the later of these two being METRO, as like the Philistines, the return of the Nephilim²⁸.

I continued, "Perhaps Wells had it right:"

The only true measure of success is the ratio between what we might have done and what we might have been on the one hand, and the thing we have made...of ourselves on the other.

²⁸ Nephilim were thought to creations of fallen angels and humans; a hybrid described as larger in proportion than humans, they existed before the Great Flood and, as well, afterward as, for instance, among the Philistines. Further evidence of these types occurs in the Exodus where, in the Land of Canaan, the Hebrew nomads face a notably giant people.

But is success an objective? I just want a solution,
I thought as Ben made his presence known.

"I agree; Wells had it right." Ben added.

"You're Ben? I expected more than a boy," Phil
remarked with his usual cavalier way.

Seemingly ignoring the slight, Ben greeted us and,
without hesitation, continued from an earlier
discussion of my latest reading. "Wells spoke of
empire too."

He had heard now of the moral decay that had
followed the collapse of supernatural religion in
the minds of ignoble man, the decline of public
honor, the ascendancy of wealth. For men, who had
lost their belief in [the maker], had still kept
their faith in property—and wealth ruled a venial
world.²⁹

"Let me guess; you're either a poet or a
philosopher," Phil remarked, evidently confident.

"No Phil, he's just a boy who loves to learn," I
said, as though needing to come to Ben's defense.
And to my deep thoughts, I returned; thoughts
positively on the future—in spite of our problems—and
a destiny before us:

[A] Vast inheritance of which I did not dream.³⁰

²⁹ H. G. Wells.

³⁰ H. G. Wells.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Learn more by

We learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it than we do from learning the answer itself.

- Lloyd Alexander (1924-2007); author

“It’s Ben,” Cal announced.

Reaching out to embrace me, Phil continued: “I was just questioning Churchill’s ideas of empire and the mind. What are your thoughts on this one, Ben?”

Let me think about this; what is this runner really asking? “If I remember right, Winston Churchill said:”

A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality.

“And so I must run. I must do what I must do”, Phil added.

“And be swift and stealthy,” Cal finished, speaking from experience.

We continued our conversation on empire; what happened and why.... But as I listened, I could not forget that all empires had inevitably collapsed from within, from the ancients described in THE WAY, to

the most recent—even that, once here. *But why bother distinguishing if humanity is so apt to repeat its failures* was a frequent, almost futile thought.

“Maybe the real concern, the question, should be how we learn to be genuine human beings as conceived to be,” I said.³¹

“What was that Ben; something about learning from our mistakes,” Phil asks, more or less.

“I was thinking out loud Phil; thinking about the certainty of the empire’s fall.”

“Cal says you think well,” Phil quipped. “So tell us more, about empire and all.”

Caleb says he needs me; he says I can be of real value to COMMUNITY. But I am afraid, and don’t want my fear to be an obstacle or setback. I know my heart; it desires the imaginative, the fictional; for in this make-believe world, I can:

...in some strange way, go to the central issues; it's one of many ways to express feelings about real people, about real human relationships.³²

“Still thinking are you,” Phil said as a prod.

I would rather dream than be faced with insolvable decisions.

³¹ From Lloyd Alexander: “My concern is how we learn to be genuine human beings.”

³² Lloyd Alexander.

IN THE LESSENING

Looking with some intent, I finally replied, “Here is my sense of it. Wells tells or describes why empire fell—why all empires fall.” I began; and as I went on, I drew upon the writing and words of Wells; his views of an empire, Britannia. Moral decay was a symptom of “collapse of supernatural religion”; and, while men lost their faith in such “supernatural” things, they held on to the belief that wealth would win the day. “Simply put, they worshiped the created instead of the creator.”



“Precisely,” Caleb shouted as he clapped his hands. “Ben, I really need you—we need you. What do you say; are you with us; are you all-in?”

“There’s only one right answer,” Phil added.

Dealing with my fears would only worsen, I thought.

“I don’t know Caleb. He looks like someone just popped his balloon,” Phil remarked.

“Okay Phil,” Cal said, to suggest that the tone of his comments should end.

Looking toward the ground, I responded with all I had. “I want to be all-in. I am for us. But I just don’t know if I’m ready. Caleb, you know what I’m talking—”

“Yes Ben, we’ve been through it, you and me.”

IN THE LESSENING

“I don’t think your sorrows and fears are going to stop you. Sure, you’ve got some things to work through—just as we have and do—but this common condition is strength, not weakness.”

Despair [or sorrow] shows us the limit of our imagination. Imaginations [that are] shared create collaboration, and collaboration creates community, and community inspires social change.³³

“Then I’ll do it,” I confirmed.

“Cal, it looks like Ben is all-in.”

³³ Terry Tempest Williams; Author, *Naturalist*

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

An adventure is

An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered; an adventure is an inconvenience rightly considered.

- G. K. Chesterton

“What is it, Cal?”

“The dispatches; it doesn’t look good, Sal. We’ve got to do something now.”

As I began to explain, that “something” became clearer: COMMUNITY would have to put lives on the line once again; this time, in a joint-effort to rescue hostages.

It was near a month ago that we did something similar; and though we only saved one, it was worth it. No lives of COMMUNITY lost, but only the morbid memories. “What are your thoughts on this?”



“Well, I know it’s necessary, but I don’t like it,” Sal replied.

“I know how you feel Sal. I have my own doubts about this, my own dislikes.”

"[Oh well,] Life is either a daring adventure or nothing, [don't you know?]"³⁴

"An 'adventure' it is indeed. Prepare to leave in an hour and, another thing; I want you to take Bart."

"Do you really think he's ready?"

"There is no teaching to compare with example."³⁵ I said, quoting a courageous one. "And you are an excellent example."

"If the hostages are still alive, they will be waiting for you. But Sal, it could be much worse."

"I know; hope for the best, plan for the worse."

These sorts, the kind that go after our own COMMUNITY, are contracted by METRO; they are worse than the worst, the kind that are gratified in the gruesome and grotesque. "They find some sick amusement in all this...."

"I'm afraid so Cal; but then, should we expect any other," Sal said, questioning the possibilities.

[For] a man must be certain of his morality for the simple reason that he has to suffer for it.³⁶

"And we know about suffering," Cal added. "Yes, even as they have...."

³⁴ Helen Keller.

³⁵ Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts.

³⁶ G. K. Chesterton.

IN THE LESSENING

Sal brought up the matter of weapons. "The others will want to know...."

"That is a matter that will have to be worked out, but you know how we stand," I said. I did not know what weapons would be available, if any. If I had, I would have told Sal. Overall, we tried to steer clear of aggression: *as one lives, but also dies by the sword. I had to believe that the answer was kilometers away; a belief that needed to be shared by the others too.*

This was the biggest of callings so far for Bart. "He is not one of us; not yet," Sal said.

So at issue was whether Bart could handle this—or even would want to. But these concerns subsided when he agreed, though understandably with reluctance.

"I don't have to tell you that—"

"That you're afraid of what may happen. I know, but Bart:"

Try to think of it as an adventure; it's healthy to get in hot water—it keeps you clean.³⁷

"Do I need to be clean—this clean? I like you people, I do; but this is beyond that."

Sure, Sal is not totally sold, but then, we all share some level of doubt from day to day in life and living. I can think of every reason to hold him out, but Bart needs to experience the darker side of COMMUNITY.

³⁷ G. K. Chesterton.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

The want to

I don't want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve immortality through not dying.

- Woody Allen

I laid there thinking about a film, *Sleeper*.³⁸ Filled with a lot of antics, the plot involved a store owner who was awakened from 200 years of cryogenic freezing. I can still see the tin foil being removed from his face—still wearing the hallmark eye glasses. *It was a riot.*



If only the law was so slapstick, thinking of several scenes with a “Pinkerton” style policing agent. *The chase scenes were high-speed hilarity harmonizing with jazz music.*

“Cal needs to see you right away,” a voice came from outside.

“It doesn’t look good.” And as he proceeded to explain, I realized that I was no longer in the comedy of *Sleeper*. “Sal, what are your thoughts on this...?”

³⁸ *Sleeper*; a film directed by and starring Woody Allen, 1973.

IN THE LESSENING

"Well, I know it's necessary," I said.

"Dangerous—a real inconvenience—but are you up for adventure," Cal asks.

"I'm not sure how useful I'll be; if I don't get at least 600 years, I'm grouchy all day."

Cal looked confused.

"Oh, a line from a film," I said.

"I remember that film: the high-speed chase scenes—like something out of silent films."

"Ye; like the films with Charlie; ah, what was his last name," I continued.

"Chaplin; Charlie Chaplin", Caleb answered. "But back to the future, you need to form your team and be prepared to leave in less than an hour. Oh, and I want you to include Bart."

"Do you really think he's ready," I ask, with serious concern. "I mean, he's not really one of us."

"I'm not completely certain," Cal said candidly.

Parting our ways, each of us shared some sense of the danger that lie ahead; still, such situations were not unusual or uncommon; it is the life and living of COMMUNITY in a region where peace is highly prized.

IN THE LESSENING

In the minutes that followed, we formed the team selecting those best suited for the experience. The exception was Bart.

Of course, we wondered if he would work; that is, if he could really sacrifice himself for what, weeks ago, he did not even know existed. This is one of the dilemmas that decisions involve; the uncertainty of outcomes, the possibility of failure, the realization of unacceptable risks.

Bart was understandably reluctant; but who wouldn't be in his circumstance—or for the matter—as a part of this rescue team?

Much of the details were deferred until we were joining the others, and even then, the tactic would have to be finalized within sight of the hostages, their captures. This seat-of-the-pants strategy had proven not only effective, but essential, as one ancient warrior so aptly put it:

Plans are nothing; planning is everything.³⁹

So planning was done on-the-fly; with points along our journey giving rise to new information and, then, possible changes and so on. Each of us knew the steps; except for Bart of course, who had to learn as he went. Provisions were drawn from the stores, gear was checked and the plan—as it was—presented to the team.

³⁹ Dwight Eisenhower.

IN THE LESSENING

“Here we are, once again faced with a big challenge,” Cal began.

This [region] of ours... must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate. [We shuould desire a community] of mutual trust and respect.⁴⁰

“This desire is daunting, we know; as we face powerful forces envoking such fear and hate among other ills.

We want for light where there is much darkness. But to see THE LIGHT is not enough; we have to embrace it and ensure it is not extinguished.”

[This effort] is not long entrusted to the weak and timid.⁴¹

“So then, let us be courageous knowing that life and living is beyond the present, even that to come.”

⁴⁰ Dwight Eisenhower (with some modifications).

⁴¹ Dwight Eisenhower (with some modifications).

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Courage is not

Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather
the judgment that something else is more
important than fear.

- James Neil Hollingworth

By now, I was getting use to the rigor and rituals of COMMUNITY. *I must admit that this place is so different in so many ways.*

Following a simple lunch of raw vegetables, hard bread and honey, I sat under a tree, relaxed; ready for an afternoon read and rest.

A book on activism had been loaned to me from Caleb's collection. It featured several people with ideas that might, in some way, make me wiser or at least willing.... These ideas were new to me: *what would be worth taking so much risk*, I thought. *Suffering and even dying for a cause, some idea?* And as this central thought stay with me, I read:

Life's most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?⁴²

Below these words, the following credit:

Martin Luther King; born 1929, died 1968;
assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

⁴² Martin Luther King, Jr.; Minister, Civil Rights Activist.

IN THE LESSENING

He was holy, even hated, as I continued to comprehend from the reading. He was there, in Memphis, representing a cause for labor; something to do with sanitation workers. Why would that be so controversial? What or who gave them the right for anything? They were as I am, or was.... We have or had no stature or status to protest or demand such.

The proletariat has always had a place, always a position. That's why I was so important in METRO. I was important, even essential, to the efficiency and effectiveness of the enterprise. It was my privilege to be a PRO. "Wait a minute," I whispered, "What am I thinking?"

Looks like King did some time in a metropolis of his day. Something about an explosion, some letters, or a protest, I considered. No wonder Caleb suggested that I study this one.

This man, King, spoke to me. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

And then he said: "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."

If he were alive now, I bet he would...; for if he did, he could sit or go anywhere he wanted—just as long as it was approved or authorized, of course.

Moving from this man, I turned to another holy person; a woman with blindness who tried to get people to see. What was her story, I wondered. "She

IN THE LESSENING

died in 1968; a time for which I am becoming increasingly aware as pivotal in this nation-state's history."

Caleb interrupted: "I hate to cut you off Bart, but you have been recruited for a rescue mission."

And in the next few minutes, I learned that I would be part of a team to rescue some held as hostages. "Where are these hostages?" Cal was brief with the details; something about a coliseum in Talladega.

Then I realized that the name, Talladega, had appeared in connection with the activist, Helen Keller. And aside from the fact that the name was derived from an ancient community, it was the named of the school she attended; a place that helped those with disadvantages or disabilities.



Keller had a fascinating life. Though struck deaf and blind in her childhood; she was able to do much. As I looked back at the reading, her words rang true to me:

What we have once enjoyed we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.

Perhaps my dreams are more than the imaginary. Maybe what I've been dreaming once happened; it is who I really was, or am.

I do have my fears of what lies ahead. But can I forget that people like her did incredible things in and even with their limitations?

IN THE LESSENING

It is true—she was right—as I read her words again:
Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.

For she knew all too well; any sense of being secure
is simply short-lived—it is but a dream; for:

Security does not exist in nature, nor do the
children of men as a whole experience it.

*Can I forgo my duty when COMMUNITY is calling, and is
crying?*

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Bear with

Men exist for the sake of one another. Teach them then or bear with them.

- Marcus Aurelius Antoninus

With the team formed, we set-out on foot for the shoals. Movements were: single-file, dispersed at varied length; dependent on weather conditions, visibility, and the chance of confrontation.

A few hand-signals and animal calls was the repertoire of non-verbal communication; and though used on a limited basis, these forms had proven useful.

“We are not aggressors”, I would remind them, “But we may have to face aggression—which is why we plan, practice and prepare.” We are protectors; but if confrontation occurs, we are prepared....

But all the preparation will not ensure that everyone survives, of course. In the end, we must heed to the wisdom of the ancients.

It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live.⁴³

⁴³ Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.

IN THE LESSENING

But then there was Bart; and bearing in mind that he was new, such words might not any meaning, let alone matter. So in his situation, I had offered some words that had somehow remained from, of all places, the Roman Empire. “Look [within you]; there is a source of strength which will always spring-up.”⁴⁴ And though it seems contrary to my own convictions, this source provided meaning in matters and moments like these.

After several hours of travel, we made it to the shoals; there, we joined the other part of the rescue team. Taking a few minutes for updates, we would travel north to the coliseum, the racetrack; and somewhere within that large expanse, we would locate the holding area of the hostages.



Led by a friend of mine, “Matthew”, the combined team would still not equal the strength of the rouges. Yet, Mat was skilled in the standards—so as to leave no doubt as to our movements and methods against greater odds.

Within several kilometers of the racetrack, we could see the remnants: a large-scaled pavilion—something like the coliseums in METRO—though much longer in length. The whole complex lay in ruin; scavengers and years of dormancy and neglect had left nothing more than a shell of the metal structure and track.

⁴⁴ Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (with some modifications).

IN THE LESSENING

This artifact was evidence of what happens when entertainment is elevated above all else. It is an example of an empire of exploitation—of everything, of everyone, of everywhere without apparent end or ethos. *It was a force of diversion and distraction.*

Yet wisdom never dies—not even for such empires:

Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present.⁴⁵

And while I cannot change what has happened; perhaps in a small way, I can help change what is happening and still, what will....

A crude drawing of the property gave us a better sense of how to approach and engage the rouges.

“We must assess what we’re up against”: how many are out there—how lethal they are—how much damage has been done,” Mat said.

But would we use: a distraction, a decoy, or the coming of death? *What approach should we take?*

A distraction could turn attention away from the hostages. A decoy could be the illusion of superior strength or size. Then the “coming of death”: a contagious illness commonly recognized in the region; one that spooks even this sort.

What will work now?

⁴⁵ Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.

IN THE LESSENING

Not much time but, if THE WAY permits, we may save at least one poor soul. And still, we must plan and execute, while believing:

Nothing happens to anybody [who is] not fitted by nature to bear.”⁴⁶

And bear-up, we must, for there is no other way.

“Bart, are you still with us?”

“I am...for us,” Bart said boldly.

And his reply, though evidently taken from Ben, meant much to me at the moment. I felt a warm glow—perhaps THE LIGHT—come over me; a reassurance that this cause was planned, even providential, for the sake and survival of COMMUNITY.

Darkness was delaying our visual of the target; and with the sun still hidden, we continued our planning while at least resting our feet, if not our senses. Silence was ordered save for the few exchanges with the scouts serving as our own eyes.

“What’s the latest, Mat?”

⁴⁶ Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Not ease but

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

- Helen Keller; author, lecturer, activist

Is this what they called providence?

As we walked past the decaying structure, I begin to draw the relationship; the school with the woman. *She was a remarkable person*, I remembered. A real champion for those stricken with a lessening of a more personal nature; Helen Keller knew their suffering because she was one of them.

But for her political views—her activism—she faced challenges of another kind; and in this capacity, she pursued a kind of society thought more benevolent. What compassion was afforded her before, now turned to contempt; for she took a courageous stand against what is generally called THE ESTABLISHMENT. She wrote:



I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I **will not** refuse something that I can do.

IN THE LESSENING

If only I had her courage—especially now on the eve or another effort.

I had been living in fear from the beginning, I thought. Not just in these weeks, but from long ago—as long as I can (or want to) remember.

But maybe fear is not always a bad thing? After all, fear is what prevails in METRO; it's what motivates the PRO to work, and still, to do more.

But beyond this life and living, what remains but the experience of METRO, so I thought. But everything here has changed that forever.

I had to learn on-the-fly. But this time, the training was especially important; “life and living” was on the line.

At intermittent points, a call was made to make sure everyone was present; and though the team was small, the single-filing of our movements more than justified this measure. Sal had me in the middle; so one way or another, I would not get lost.

So far so good; and by way of our lead, the route seems clear.

“We will avoid the village,” was the signal. Such places were usually off limits—too much chance of being discovered, or worse, a confrontation.

After some time, we came to a wood's edge and could see the faint lines of the coliseum. The sight of

IN THE LESSENING

such a structure reminded me again of METRO—as though I really needed help.

What a vast landscape, I thought, though most of it was overgrown with dense groundcover and scattered trees.

With more information coming in from scouts, Mat and Sal began to develop the final approach. After a half hour or so, the two joined the rest of us.

“Alright, we have two hours till sunset”, Matt began to describe the plan. “At the next hour, Sal will lead a movement along a perimeter of the track within 200 meters of the holding area.” Mat’s movement would follow a similar route along an opposite area, hidden from the track by ruins and embankments. “With darkness coming, detection will be minimal, but our silence is vitally important,” Sal continued.

Marked trails to the holding area would be left open for the “aggressors” to run—should the plan prove to work right.

They are going to flee?

The two continued: we would create the illusion that we were larger in force and size. This would be done by encircling most of holding area with torches, thus giving the aggressors the sense that we are many.

But will this illusion work?

“THE WAY remains to answer,” Sal reassured us.

IN THE LESSENING

These rouges were hardened criminals: vigilantes, marauders, and thugs contracted by POLITIC to roam the outlying areas—to do their best at doing their worst.

From what I had learned, this sort was not uncommon or unusual. *To think that none of this was known before...but before I allowed my thoughts to continue, I realized that I was heading toward the trap of either self-loathing or self-pity.*

Remember what she said:

Self-pity is our worst enemy and if we yield to it, we can never do anything good in the world.⁴⁷

Should I kick myself for being stupid, or pat myself for comfort?

But all I wanted right now was to be back in COMMUNITY, working with that woman. *It does comfort me to think of her.*

“Get your head into the game”, I heard Sal say. “Grab your gear. It’s time to move!”

⁴⁷ Helen Keller.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Madness put to

Sanity is a madness put to good uses.

- George Santayana

“Move, you scum,” came the scream, followed by the crack of a whip.

Tied to each other, we struggled to stay in series, to stay-up and stay alive. These are rouges; gangs to make sport of us—to kill for nothing more than their own warped purpose.



What did we do; what crimes have we committed? But why bother asking myself stupid questions. There is no reasonable answer, no reason for such treatment and torture, I thought.

It has been, is, and will always be that:

History is a pack of lies about cause that never happened, [that were] told by people who weren't there. [But then again] Those who do not remember the past [lies or not] are condemned to repeat it.⁴⁸

The question is not what we do or don't' do. It is instead: Why do they do what they do? And the answer lies within those forces of empire and evil.

⁴⁸ George Santayana.

IN THE LESSENING

Our crimes are merely their creations; their cause (as though they need one). *And for what? I cannot reason any cause. All I know right now is that our pain is their pleasure.*

But then, one of these sort wants to know my name. *Imagine that; as though my name really mattered—as though I matter at all to this, to them—to such as these that want only to bring us down, slowly but surely.*

“You there; what do you go by,” was the demand of one of this kind. “I said, what is your name old man?”

“Simon,” I said, with nothing left in my breath.

“Wipe that blood off your face, Simon, and stand here,” he said, forcing me into the series.

One ask of other: “Are you ready?”

“Carry this...and look this way”, forcing me further to look in a particular direction, toward some evidence of the eyes.

“We got it,” the other acknowledged.

“When will it stop,” I murmured.

“Simon says he wants to stop,” one yelled out.

And turning back my way, he struck me to the ground—the blood returning to my face. “Sure you can stop.”

IN THE LESSENING

As I lay there with my face to the ground, I wondered how much longer I would last.

"We'll stay here for now," I heard one of them yell out. "Make sure they don't try to run. If they do, end them."

I managed to look around and, though my vision was blurred by the blood, I could see that the others were there with me. We were together, forced into one pack or series.

So far no life had been taken; but why?

But as bad as things were, or could be, I had to accept that what was happening had a purpose for good. It seems foolish to think so, but for me, it was THE WAY to keep THE LIGHT alive—to be thankful even now.

[For] without the [light], the material world is a disheartening enigma.⁴⁹

As I lay there among the others, I thought about what to do inspite of my wounds and weariness. I knew that I was on the side of good, and could take comfort in knowing that:

Nothing so much enhances good as to make sacrifices for it.⁵⁰

What will I do; what can I do?

⁴⁹ Joseph Joubert.

⁵⁰ George Santayana.

IN THE LESSENING

Sensing that something was about to change, I turned to another beside me; a young man they called Nark.

“We’ve got to do something.”

“It’s impossible old man; they’re—”

“[Listen you] before you contradict an old man..., you should endeavor to understand him.”⁵¹ “I’ll say it again; we’ve got to something!”

And with that, I pulled myself up and began yelling:

“They’re coming, they’re coming. There are hundreds following THE LIGHT. THE LIGHT is coming here, coming now for you—and you best move out of THE WAY.”

⁵¹ George Santayana.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Help more than

Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him, and to let him know that you trust him.

- Booker T. Washington

Meeting Sal and his team at the shoals, I had to ask about Ben.

“Ben is beginning to do more, Mat; he is helping Cal with some administrative duties.”

“I am glad he is finding his place—overcoming the past.”

After we exchanged a few personal comments, we moved on to the matter at hand. “What is the plan, Mat?”

And with the question, I began to discuss the details on our route, stopping to field Sal’s questions or comments. We had the advantage of knowing the area; but what remained was to design the approach.

“And what if a lone wolf?”⁵² In which I responded: “Our runners tell us that activity along this area has been minimal. We don’t expect to encounter any confrontation; but of course, we’ll conduct the standard movements to avert any....”

⁵² Lone wolf: rouges on the run or otherwise separate from the pack.

IN THE LESSENING

"Good. What next, Mat," Sal asks.

"A few minutes to get our wind, and we're off. I figure it should take us about—"

"Looks like six hours, without any complications or obstacles," Sal finished.

"That's what I figured. As to the approach, our last point will be here..., " as I continued with details.

Finalizing our plan to this point, we pressed on.

I miss them, came the usual thought that almost invariably resulted from such reunions. *I miss my family.*

The past was never easy; mixed with the fantasy of my young days was the every growing reality of what happened against what might or could have happened.

In these young days, The Lessening was not understood or anticipated: one crisis, one disaster, would not be enough: after the one came another...and still another. We kept thinking that the eye of the storm would come, but it didn't: this pattern, this plague, led to permanent darkness—a dark cloud over the land, the region and beyond.

But one of my the pleasant memories was a night of camping with my papa; he and I were up north along the Coosa River. I remember that cold night: beyond the campfire, the stars were alive and the sky aglow.

IN THE LESSENING

It was though we were part of an endless sea of light. “Look papa! Is that a shooting star?”

“Could be. Someone said that shooting stars are:”

[A] tear of [the Creator] falling on such a hateful [place].⁵³

“A tear,” I asked.

“Yes Matthew, a tear of grief, of sadness.”

“But you papa; you’re not that way.”

“Matthew, your kind words mean more to me than you know.”

I still wonder...and then I ask my papa: “Do stars die, like us?”



“Well Matt, it depends on what you consider as death. Stars can make other stars; they can produce other lights. So then they don’t really die, I guess.” And after a pause, papa said: “Hard to say, but what I believe is that they never die. As long as there are lights, there is life and living.”

And now, on what could be my last day here, I see no light ahead; nothing in the wood but darkness. But by the inexplicable, a light remains in me and, I hope, in us.

“Mat, we’ve prepared the torches and are ready?”

⁵³ Adapted from the film, *The Great Santani* (1981); from the character Toomer responding to Ben on a starry night in *The Low Country*.

IN THE LESSENING

“Good, but make sure the wicks are kept dry.” *Fire and rain may not seem like a good combination, but both could work to our advantage*, I thought.

Fire and rain; hot and cold; the dry with the damp—this is life and living, as I know that:

In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. [And] we should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner [fire].⁵⁴

And I am thankful for the fire, THE LIGHT.

⁵⁴ Albert Schweitzer (with noted modification).

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Crawl out from

Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place.

- Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960)

It had been two days now; two days since the team left and still no word, nothing.

Cal was waiting for a dispatch, but even that could not satisfy the concerns of COMMUNITY; for in these times, the love of one is the love of all.

The signals of another day came, but I could not muster the motivation to face it. Not that such challenges were not unusual, accept that:

Challenges are what make life interesting;
overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.⁵⁵

But sometimes these challenges exceed my energy.

Then came a familiar voice: “Abby, is everything okay?”

“What is it, Ben?”

“I just thought you might be—”

“Well, if I am...than I guess I just have to get over it, don’t I,” I said, with some annoyance.

⁵⁵ Joshua J. Marine

“Look, I’m not here to judge you Abby. I just wanted to—”

“I know, I know; you’re just trying to do good.”

Ben knew my manner and moods, and knew that I struggled, as anyone would, with this life and living. “Ben, you’re not gonna offer another—”

“Well I was...but maybe I should wait until—”

“Why wait,” I said, realing that I could not stop his on sort of good. For I knew that Ben had a penchant for this sort of thing; always throwing someone’s musings into the matter.

“Okay Abby, if you insist, then here goes.”

The struggle alone pleases us, [and not] the victory.⁵⁶

“That’s rich Ben, rich.”

“I’m glad you think so.”

“And to what mind do we owe such inspiration,” I asks, more out of courtesy than curiosity.

“I knew you would ask,” Ben said.

And acting on my question, Ben began his brief of some guy named Blaise: “And as a mathmetician, he made some notable advances in estimating uncertainty or risks....”

⁵⁶ Blaise Pascal; mathematician, physicist, religious philosopher.

IN THE LESSENING

"That's fascinating Ben. I never knew that Pascal was a mathematician; but I'm afraid that I'm going to have to—"

"And later as a philosopher, he said:"

All men's miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone.

"Yes, I'm with him...on being alone."

"And in the possibility of friendship, Pascal noted:

If all men knew what each said of the other, there would not be four friends in the world.

"Okay Ben, I'm getting-up."

"I know you not really turned-on by this stuff, but I just thought it might make a difference."

"Oh, it's made 'a difference', alright. Look, Ben, I appreciate your effort—I really do—but you can't understand."

"I know, but that does not mean that I should not try care about COMMUNITY, about you."

He has come far, I thought, and I don't want to stand in the way of his progress if I can help it.

"Abby, I'm gonna go but before I do, I just want you to know that I'm beginning to undersand. I know that you are concerned and care about them, and about him too."

'About him...oh great.

IN THE LESSENING

“Abby, this man; this very smart, sickly man said:”

The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.

And then I went silent so that all I could hear was the sounds of COMMUNITY and Ben’s steps as he walked away.



Only then, in the moment of my ‘quiet room’, could I free myself momentarily from my own challenges, and the tears began to flow.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Power that is

I am not interested in power for power's sake,
but I'm interested in power that is moral, that
is right and that is good.

– Martin Luther King

Before leaving with the team, Bart had mentioned that he was learning of the life and living for a man named Martin Luther King.

“I knew nothing of these people,” Bart said, referring to those that Sal and others described; not just the activists or holy ones, but others too.

Admittedly, I was sceptable—history being full of lies—but over time, and with maturity, I began to embrace some as truth, the ideas as good. Those that lived long ago may have been a part of something described politically as The New Republic⁵⁷ and spiritually, as *a city upon on a hill*.⁵⁸ Whatever their vision or claim, history has a way:

First freedom and then glory—when that fails,
[then] wealth, vice, corruption—[and finally]
barbarism....⁵⁹

⁵⁷ The Roman Empire was the original republic.

⁵⁸ A phrase attributed to John Winthrop.

⁵⁹ This “moral of all human tales”, with some adaptation, is attributed to Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–18); provided from Wikipedia: “The Course of Empire”.

IN THE LESSENING

There is the moral of all human history. And here, in The Lessening, is another day to learn from the past.

On this morning, I was thinking about Abby; she had seemed exceptionally troubled, anxious about the rescue...and safe return.

“Abby, is everything okay?”

And so begin another day: to give a care, to offer a word, to help another—even at the risk of rejection, again.

We talked for a while. And though we never met eyes, I was certain that my words were wise, my way was worthy. And at the end of our conversation, she cried; just before I finally left, came a flow of tears, a release of her worries. Perhaps there was a glimmer of light over darkness and despair, for it has been said:

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. ⁶⁰

Help me to see what I have felt and know all too well. But more, to follow THE WAY that emits THE LIGHT.

“I know you’re not really turned-on by this stuff, Abby; but I just thought it might make a difference.”

‘Make a difference’, I reflected, was not the right phrase.

⁶⁰ M. L. King.

IN THE LESSENING

Maybe I should have simply said “help”, but then, maybe a “difference” is not so wrong. I don’t know; I am new at encouragment; but even so, I tend to be my worst critic. For example my statement, “not really turned-on”, did not begin to address Abby’s deeper issues. Sure, she was annoyed with me—but what’s new?

But sometimes the surgeon has to cut to help healing.

I know I can be a real pill: tough to swallow and distasteful at first. But I am learning to deal with my own issues; and as I do it, am realizing why the heart cannot be hidden from the thoughts and ideas in my head.

I can fill my head with all this history and such, but I cannot forget what happens when you try to help.

“Abby, the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing,” were my last words to her.

I know what it’s like to be degraded and disowned—to have lots of defects and dysfunctions—but I now know that the damage has not destroyed my desire to do good, to do what I believe to be right, as:

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his [own] concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.⁶¹

Will she be alright? Have I done enough...or tried too hard? What else can I do? What will she do, now?

⁶¹ M. L. King.

IN THE LESSENING

And as I walked away from her shanty, I was reassured by the belief that that the time is always right to do what is right.



And then light came upon me; it appeared from the west, warming and welcoming; and my worries, my doubts and my questions lifted off of me as a fog dissipates in the later morn.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Will forget what

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

- Maya Angelou

The dispatch runner finally arrived.

“Phil, I don’t think I could be more glad to see a face.”

“Well thanks, but I’m no so sure this is face that even my mother could love”, he said, putting a twist on his usuall self-exalation.

His levity had a degree of seriousness. A runner’s life is, shall I say, rough living; and if anyone knew this life, it was Phil. He was seasoned by now; which means that he had been running long enough to have seen it all; but equally important, he was still alive to share it with others who benefit in some way. And though relatively young (by community standards), Phil was showing the signs of his rough living: very lean, as runners are, but aged from the elements as though his body and face were from two different periods; still, his mind and body were finely-tuned like the finest of musical machines.

"What's the latest Phil," I asks immediately.

"Give me minute to catch my breath."

He paused, and then responded: "The latest word is that the team is near the coliseum track; all seems to be going as planned, the approach yet to be completed, the outcome determined."

"Anymore details," I continued.

"No other details as of yet; but if they continue on course, the rescue attempt will have happended by the next dispatch. Ideally, they will be in return with the saved," Phil explained with his usual confidence.

Breathing a sigh of relief, I said: "Have the news circulated..that all is well. Now, what about the dispatches?"

And shifting attention from the most critical, I began the usual exchange, questions and comments.

"Do you think our solution is making a difference; the bad dispatches," I asks, looking for feedback.

With a wry smile on his face, Ben replied. "Well, some measures have been relayed Cal...but I think its too early to know. Ah, I think a difference has been made; yeah, a big difference is sure to come—I'm sure of it."

"Good," I said with some wonder about emphasis on the description, 'difference'.

"I second that," Phil chimed in. "But what I really want to know is, Ben; are you making a difference—toward the making of a difference?"

"What," Ben asks, not understanding Phil's humor.

"Because if you're not making a difference, than perhaps someone else, that can make a difference, could be chosen to—"

"I think we get it Phil," Cal interrupted.

"Ben, I need you to respond to each of these items and issues. Let's go over them one by one."

Phil stood-up to leave: "Well, if that's all, I think I will go make a difference."

"Yes Phil, why don't you do that," Cal suggested.

"Well then, I think I will. Oh, have you seen Abby?"

"If you asking me, not since this morning. I think I may have run her off," Ben said.

"Must have made a difference," Phil quipped. "Could you give her this," he asks as he handed me a small figure of a horse.

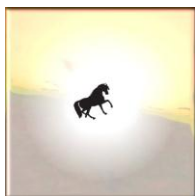
"What's this all about?"

"She's not the only one who loves horses. Phil replied. She'll understand...."

"I'll make sure she gets it," I said.

IN THE LESSENING

Curious, I had to ask, "Where did this piece come from?"



"It was with the collection of clothing and other items mentioned in the dispatch—the stuff found in the bunker."

"Any chance we'll get more of the stuff?"

"You have the inventory; just note-it in the outgoing."

And in that moment a feeling came over me. Don't ask me to explain where it came from or why, but I just had an overwhelming sense, a sentiment. "Phil, I just want you know how much we—how much I—appreciate and admire what you do for us."

"I'm glad I make a difference."

But even with his persistent, playful indifference, I had to hug him as I sensed this might be the last.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Better looking than

A Narcissist is someone better looking
than you are.

- Gore Vidal

"Hey pretty boy, you're needed now," came a voice, with pounding, at the door.

What do they want this time, as I turned from my desire.

"Where do think you're going," said my desire.

"Look; when they call, I've got to answer."

Looking on while I dressed was a face of conflicting expressions: one being salacious and the other, of scorn.

"When will you be back," my desire asks.

"I want know until I find out what they want."

"Well then; don't expect me to wait, 'pretty boy'."

And turning away, I said nothing. *This conversation was doomed from the start. Here we go again—another impulse, another impossible person, I thought, and whom am I to blame?*

IN THE LESSENING

But scorn for what or whom? Why should I consider hate at all? Only if I care—or cared at all—would I want to hate or care about being hated. *This will pass; it or they always do; then another arrives as does the momentary pleasure and passion.*

I'm done, I thought, as I passed through the door.

"What do you want from me," I asks.

"What was that; I think you would be better-off posing the question as: 'what can I do?'"

They want me to show gratitude, but for what?

"Now look, you have a job to do; or have you forgotten why you're here," was the refrain.

It is this kind of dogma that I so detest. Who are they that I should have to bow down like some slave?

"Now, if you fail to complete—," came more of the refrain.

Here we go again; the threat: if I don't, than.... Or if I can't, than (something else), or worse.

When first given the chance to leave METRO, I took it. *Anything would be better than what I had.*

I was told that I could go far; that with my looks and youth, the mundane and monotony would be a memory.

"Did you hear—are you listening pretty boy?"

IN THE LESSENING

Did I hear? Am I deaf or just stupid?

“Now, you are going to be...,” the refrain continued droning on.

I am going to be what? Lower and than the lowest; servile on one side, and serpentine on the other; passive but aggressive.

“Now, you will report to...,” it continued unabated by my apparent indifference and disgust.

I will “report”. How fine and formal the words; a fragrance from the foulest. I cannot keep going; sooner or later, something has to give—something will blow—or I will end it all in one final, glorious moment of grand scale.

My orders given, I returned to more than emptiness; a dwelling with damages left by my recent desire, now my second worst enemy.

“What a mess.”

I could still smell the presence of passion: the desirable with the destructive. *But this disorder, the damages and such, is my deal; from the door comes the delivery and through the door, the destiny of my desires—of what pleases my passion.* As it is, there is nothing left for me to do here.



“Are you ready,” said more of the refrain.

IN THE LESSENING

Here it is; in the wake of one's want and wrath comes "the sum" of the same: the one, once desire, passed through my door to do the dirty deed and destruction, and the rest of the refrain are at my door to finish the deal.

"You've got yours orders boy; now go," was the last order of the day.

Now it's time to go; and it has been made so easy. Anything would be better than what I've had—and now, what I no longer have. I was told that I could go far; and until now, I believed it.

But life is not a succession of urgent "nows".
It's a listless trickle of "why should I's".⁶²

⁶² From the film, *The Libertine* (2005), script of John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

My occupation is

My occupation now, I suppose, is jail....

- "Ted" Kaczynski; mathematician-professor; writer;
survivalist; activist; "Unabomber"

"What is your name, old man?"

I stuttered, "Simon."

Strange in the way the others bring comfort to me now: to not have endure the isolation above the incarceration, the loneliness without liberty.

"Hey, can't you hear old man? I ask you your name."

Sure I can hear, but do I want to...obey a fool?

By now it was known that I was nearly blind. *But that's better than being senile, right?*

"He must be an idiot," was shouted, as a whip cracked above me.

It's one thing to stand and take it, but another to collapse or cower at the crack of a whip. How did I get here, and now; a time and place that makes me want to regret that my life and living has lasted too long—much longer than the days as a promising student, a scholar, and a father with a family.

IN THE LESSENING

I was told that I could go far; that with my mind and a vision, the opportunities were boundless. Yes, *a good mind and a great vision; these were mine, my own.*

A vision of a new society: much more than that of The Great Society or of The New Deal, that would last indefinitely: a perfect people for a perfect place at a perfect time—an ultimate utopia. *It seemed perfect—too perfect for any people, of every place and all time.*

So it was only a matter of time that I lost the vision. But in this loss, my mind was saved. Oh, it didn't happened all at once; but gradually, step by step, came the understanding that:

The most significant thing about [a man] is what he thinks; and significant also is how he came to think it...and if he did not continue, what the influences were which caused him to change his mind. ⁶³

And though my thinking is not always sound, sensible or even sane; it is mine to understand and to help my understanding.

But such thinking (about one's thinking) did not work for long. Such thinking became defiance, then dissent, and finally reason enough for detainment. So my occupation changed from one that "could go far" to one confined, controlled and condemned.

⁶³ Albert Jay Nock, *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man.*

IN THE LESSENING

My comfort was the belief that what I did was right, for:

An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscious of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.⁶⁴

Did I think that I would ever be there, that I would be here? No, but the question should not be about the when or where, but rather, the why?



“Old man, ‘can you hear me?’”

“Yes, I hear you,” I weased.

The voice was that that of a young man; someone I did not know or recognize—as though he just showed-up.

“Who are you?”

“Narcissus, ‘Nark’,” he replied.

Unlike the rest of the lot, Nark was not worn and weary—or even weathered. He was oddly pleasant to look at; young and youthful.

“What are you staring at,” he asks.

“I was about to ask you the same thing.”

⁶⁴ Martin Luther King.

IN THE LESSENING

And with that rebuttal, he momentarily withdrew as though trying to look tough or hardened; either way, it was as difficult as trying to disguise an elephant. *But then, what's the likelihood that he knows what an elephant is?*

As the hours passed however, my attention turned to much more; it was evident that Nark was some sort of mole: someone planted among us to collect information, create a incident, or something more insidious.

I remember these types from my eariler days—locked-up in there. Oh yes, I remember them well. All the young, pleasant faces; the minds full of new ideas, the hearts that believed—as I did—that a way could be constructed under the convictions that each and all are equal. But even with all that promise and potential still, they gave-in and gave-out—their ideas deconstructed and deceased.

But for now, here, there was nothing I could do except lay low and wait for status quo to take a turn; this would be my moment. *I may be blind and bound, but I stil have my brains.*

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

It's all about

It's all about control. Control is illusory...
if your goal is to become master of your own
destiny, you have more to learn.

- Michael J. Fox, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way
to the Future...: Twists and Turns and Lessons
Learned*

I could not relax until the rescue was complete and COMMUNITY back in order. *But then, when was the last time we were in some semblance of order?*

Order is not something that we can achieve—no matter how much we try—as there are simply too many uncontrollable factors; too many strings left untied, the effort alone is not enough to overcome chaos and to ever achieve any desirable state of order. As it is, “Community is about caring, and not control,” I would repeat to myself and to others.

We had to know and understand the primary difference between METRO and COMMUNITY; the former about controlling, the latter about caring. And though the difference seems simple, it is not. The differences are complex. “There are forces behind control,” I would explain. “And you may know what these are...and may understand the source and recognize the presence and personality of such forces.”

IN THE LESSENING

Our nature must contend with the desire for control such that, no matter how much you love someone, you still want to have your own way.⁶⁵ And when we don't get "our own way", we can be frustrated to the point that we decide to lose our love—if we loved at all.

We may think that we did the right thing; that our individual human will was rightly intended for someone or somebody. But because that "someone or somebody" didn't agree with (or acquiesce to) our will, they were wrong and worse, they no longer deserved or earned our love and devotion.

So when we think we've lost control, then we lose control. Our ability to care overtaken by control, our will is: not about giving, but about taking; not about surrendering, but about subduing; not about the other, but all about self. "Wake-up before it's too late!" Here is where caring must be learned and then lived as not only "the difference", but as our defense against institutions such as METRO.

"We must learn and keep learning that caring and controlling cannot coexist," I would repeat to myself and to others. But repeating such words does not make for the difference, our defense.... Words are not enough for caring, just as our effort is not enough for controlling. But "not enough" is a good thing, as it allows for hope, life and love. The danger of too little caring is that you end-up with too much controlling, and before you realize it—if you realize at all—you are as malevolent and manipulative as METRO.

⁶⁵ Chuck Palahniuk, Lullaby.

IN THE LESSENING

METRO was to be the marriage of a perfect people for a perfect place at a perfect time, but in truth, it is a mirage; appearing to be a place of paradise, when in fact, it is a desert of the despot, the deceived and the dead. It is the essence of empire.

“Am I right, Ben?”

Ben nodded in agreement.

Abby, who had the misfortune of hearing my diatribe, asks: “How did it begin; I mean, where did such beliefs come from?”

“Ben, would you like to answer that one?”

“It began thousands of years ago, but over time and with advancements in technology, metastasized into that which led to THE LESSENING,” Ben began.

“Sounds like that common health condition that plagued mankind,” Abby commented.

“Yes, it is like cancer; and similarly, it has had a cure all along,” Ben replied.

“Tell us more,” I said with appreciation.

Responding, Ben explained:

Control in modern times requires more than force, more than law. It requires that a population dangerously concentrated in cities...be taught that all is right as it is. ⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Howard Zinn, *A Peoples History of the U.S.*

Ben continued:

They began by controlling books...films, one way or another, one group or another, political bias, religious prejudice...; there was always a minority...or majority afraid of the dark...the future...the past...of themselves....⁶⁷

Ben's words were not his own; he had learned much for a young person, but he had yet to learn that learning for learning's sake is not enough. My appreciation in this moment came in seeing him apply his learning as a teacher or mentor—the next vital step.

"I know about fear. I know what it can do—what it has done, to me," Abby confessed.



"Yes, you do. But you know love too."

After a pause, Ben added: "Empire does not require that its servants love each other, merely that they perform their duty."

Abby, with more a conclusion than a question, said: "So duty is driven by fear, and not love?"

"Both. There is a fine line between love and fear, but I would like to think that I prefer love."

⁶⁷ Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE CAUSE (of an inconvenient adventure)

Hell followed with

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.

- Revelation 6:8

With the latest information at hand, Mat declared that the planning was over when he said: “We are about to rout the rouges.”

I liked this plan already; it's not only well formulated and intended, but practically in the bag.

“We’ll single-out; each spaced some 20 meters—covering more than half the circumference of the occupied area,” Mat continued.

Big risks, I thought, spreading ourselves very thin—but then again, we have to use our weakness as our weapon.

“More than 300 meters of intermittant lights...,” he continued, “with added, loud acoustics.”

The amplified acoustics was done with a collection of horns fashioned from nature; a sort of throwback to the days of the Nordsman.

“At my call, the acoustics will begin... followed by the lights, one after another, in succession.”

IN THE LESSENING

So the sounds will startle them and the lights will shock them—if everthing works according to plan.

“And the call is,” I asks Mat.

“It is still up in the air, Sal. But we know that this plan depends on darkness, so the call must happen before daybreak—soon, I think.”

Gathering my group together, I conveyed Mat’s instruction: “Mat’s call is coming, so without delaying further, let’s get our gear and file into position.” And with those final words, we proceeded as planned while leaving the marked trails open as the intended egress for the escape for rouges on the run. *If this works, it will be a miracle*, I thought at the moment. *Be then, miracles happen every day.*

“Remember, ‘For us’,” I murmured to Bart as a he fell in to the file.

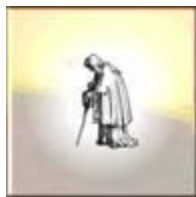
Still, more information arrived: some of those being held were notably in bad shape, but this news was not unexpected but, in fact, was considered postive given the history of such abductions. Honesty, I was surprised that they were still alive— knowing the nature of their captures. It was the suffering that concerned those of us who know and have experienced such levels of suffering. *But I can’t think about that right now*, remembering the words: “I shall not allow no man to belittle my soul by making me hate him.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Booker T. Washington.

IN THE LESSENING

"Alright Sal, let's go," Mat whispered as I brought up the rear.

Several minutes passed-by as we waited in a silence, broken only by the intermittant shouting among the rouges. From where I stood, one of the captive had been singled-out. He looked older, gray hair and beard, bearing the resemblance of some sacred figure. To add to the impression, he carried a staff evidently to help him walk and perhaps more. It was obvious the this sacred figure was feeble; maybe the result of the conditions, but certainly his age. He fumbled around as though disoriented. An exchange with his captures ensued, and then I heard: "I'll say it again; we've got to do something!" Of all those being held, he seemed the least likely to start something; but as the scene developed, he strained to pull himself up and then cry at the top of his lungs: "They're coming, they're coming. There are hundreds following THE LIGHT. THE LIGHT is coming here, coming for you." And immediately following, two things happended: the first was that he was grabbed by the throat chocking off his cry; the second was that the necessary "call" had arrived—as though by some miracle—to sound the horns. Mat first sounded his horn which then signaled others to do same. I fired my torch and then relayed it to the next and so on. As our plan played-on, the lights in the holding quickly faded under the fear of discovery—disorder and death followed in the darkness that had overcome them all along.



IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

War interested in

You may not be interested in war, but war is
interested in you.

- Leon Trotsky

The immediate order was to hold allowing the melee to do its work. This response came the moment that the plan began to materialize—the rouges thrown into frenzy, fighting among them-selves with ferocity.

“Use aggression only as necessary,” was the subsequent call; a standing order to use aggression only in our defense. But still, we paired-off to reduce the possibility of a challenge, confrontation. As to hostages, Mat reminded us: “We have to accept that they have fled; or if not, have kept among themselves, as some are trained to do.”

Even with daybreak, our view remained somewhat obscured by a thick fog that remained; a kind of mystic presense that, even with the clashing of souls in the foreground, produced a kind of peace. Having an English quality about it, the view reminded me:

I will develop my life for the greater
good....[and] never boast, but cherish
humilityinstead...[and] speak the truth at all
times, and forever keep my word.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ *King Arthur and the Legends of the Round Table* with some omissions-modifications as noted.

IN THE LESSENING

"Sal, the fog should burn-off within the hour. I want you to be ready to move."

"Will do, Mat," was all I needed to say, having felt helpless to this point.

What will happen? The plan going forward would include: the body counts, casualty reports, and care for the wounded; the return to console the bereaved, to celebrate with the saved and to accept any indifference or apathy of those whose only solace is that they did not have to sacrifice or suffer. Yes, *the traditions of our species live on.*

Why do we war? Not that we want to war, but that war seems to want us. It wants us all! It finds us whether together or alone, and then embeds itself between and within us. Once embedded, war is: a disease incurable; a debt untenable; a death unabridgeable.

The fog was beginning to lift, which meant that we would continue on plan to recover the hostages. "Alright, let's do it; file out—you know the routine—but be careful, cautious. We'll tend to the wounded after ensuring the area is cleared of the rouges. Those too hurt to travel will remain here to await assistance, while we make our return."

"But they may not make," Bart said, showing a level of personal conscious I did not expect.

"That is a possibility, Bart, but it has to be, given the risks," I replied, without time to elaborate.

IN THE LESSENING

Bart turned and walked on, realizing to some degree the darkness that is endemic in life and living in COMMUNITY. *This is a side of life and living that no one desires, but everyone must endure*, I thought.

“What the status,” Mat asks me.



“So far, we’ve counted thirteen dead, ten with mortal wounds, and three that can go with us.”

After a pause, Mat continued: “What about our own?”

“Three of our people have passed, two are severely wounded, and then the three to go.”

“Alright Sal, are they ready?”

“Yes, they’re ready.”

“And what of the dead?”

“Still being prepared,” I told him, “with rights to come.”

“Let’s get them covered-up; that’s the best we can do, right now.”

“I agree Mat.”

“And the others?”

IN THE LESSENING

"I don't expect the eight to make-it through the night; the other two are possible."

Mat looked like all of us; weary and worn, but worried about the coming return. "We'll need to remain careful and cautious. I estimate at least twenty of the rouges are on the run. You know what they can do," Mat reminded us.

"Yes, but we'll be ready," we assured him.

Pulling me aside, Mat ask, "How's Bart?"

"He's about as I expected; shocked, but able to control his emptions for now," I explained. "The same reaction that anyone would have witnessing such for the first time."

"Keep and eye on him; better yet, I would give that assignment to some of the others," Mat suggested.

"I've taken of that already."

"Why do I even bother, Sal?"

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

The gift of

There are souls in this world which have the gift of finding joy everywhere and of leaving it behind them when they go.

- Fredrick Faber (1814-1863); theologian and composer

I wonder why the delay. This is the most difficult part; waiting, wondering and worrying all the way to the end.

But who was I fooling; we all knew the life; that even such challenging moments like this were common enough to almost be, well, normal. Some were seemingly better at coping or adjusting than others; they went about their business without an open word or inquiry; others less so. Still, the atmosphere was tense, a silence before the storm.

"I want everyone to come together; a gathering," I told Ben. *This will lift some of the tension*, I thought. *Something needs to happen.*

"I'll pass the word."

"Oh, and Ben; I really appreciate the attention, The exactness in...duties is a wonderful source of cheerfulness [for me].⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Frederick William Faber with some modification.

IN THE LESSENING

"So I am not too methodical," Ben said, perhaps referring to one of Phil's quips.

"Maybe you are methodical; but that's better than being to little...", I replied. Ben smiled and went about his duties. *This evening's coming together is just what we need; a reminder of who and what we are.*

While still entranced by my image of our COMMUNITY, Ben came running up: "Cal, I have very bad news."

"What is it; is it about the rescue?"

"No, but it has to do with the delay, the dispatches," Ben began. "Cal; I'm afraid that Phil is missing."

As Ben continued with what detail he had received, our last conversation came to mind; and especially the overwhelming feeling toward Phil—as though seeing him for the last time. "Thank you Ben. We will mention Phil this evening at the gathering," was I could say at the moment—saddened but in some way aware that such was coming.

"Yes, we will not forget him," Ben said as he turned away.

I could not help myself from withdrawing for a while; to remove myself to grieve in my own way. "Ben, I am going step-away for a few; if you can, please continue preparing for tonight's event."

"You will be there," Ben asks, recognizing my emotional state.

"Of course; I can't wait," I reassured him. But at the moment, I just wanted to crawl into hole. "Oh, and make sure everybody is coming. I've noticed some missing, but haven't had the chance to follow-up."

"Don't believe anyone will miss this; the times are too important," Ben reassured me.

Walking always helped me worked through troubled times; it seem to exercise my mind and heart as much as my muscles. *These old muscles are tight*, I thought. *And to think that I was once as lean and limber as Phil.*

Somehow I had began to prepare for this news; and though the rescue had taken center stage, my mind was some working through this disappointment even before the news came. It is so; he was right when he said:

There can be no great disappointment where there is not deep love.⁷¹

I continued to walk, stopping momentarily to take in something positive: the beauty of nature, the voices of children singing, and all other things that might restore a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the living, now and forever. My desire was to turn inward in times like this, but my duty would often get in the way; which means that sooner or later something has to give. *Right now, my desire is more determined than duty, my inwardness more in control than any will that might say*, "But you had the good fortune of knowing Phil as a friend in fellowship."

⁷¹ Martin Luther King.

IN THE LESSENING

I began to reflect on Phil; all the years that I had known him (or known of him) from birth till....

About that moment, Ben approach: "The children have been rehearsing and would like to give you a preview of tonight's music."

"I can think of nothing more welcoming right now."

And as we made the way to them, I could already hear a favorite of mine:

Faith of our fathers, living still,
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword;
Oh how our hearts beat high with joy
Whenever we hear thy wondrous
voice!⁷²



⁷² Frederick William Faber, "Faith of our Father" with some modification.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

What it is

It is the heart that makes a man rich. He is rich according to what he is, not according to what he has.

- Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887)

“Let’s take a few to rest our feet,” I gave the order after our withdrawal—perhaps escape—from a hot situation.

To the point, we had made good progress; no confrontations though a few random sightings of the rouges. Our numbers now included the original twenty of the team, the healthy and wounded, and a few of our own found wondering along our return.

“How are the wounded doing, Sal?”

“The two being carried are stable, Sal said. I am more concerned about the lot of us who are opting to carry them,” Sal said in a moment of humor.

“All I can say (to that) is when you need another hand, let me know.” But on more serious note—as though this situation could be less—several of the others were struggling to keep up. Lowering my voice, “About those struggling; who are they?”

“Well Mat, let’s start with the worst.”

Already familiar with the first, Simon, I was not surprised about a variety of problems—most of which were ongoing and not particularly due to the treatment. “He’s one of the two on a gurney. I don’t think he’ll make it to the end,” Sal continued.

“That’s probably true for all of us, don’t you think Sal?”

“I would prefer it that way; ‘the end’ will only be less of the same—if you know what I mean.”

“We must be really tired,” I said in an attempt to explain our light humor.

“But Simon is passing quickly, Mat.”

“I know Sal; I have been watching him too.”

Sal continued down the list; each person, their condition and strength, and other details collected while in transit. For each one, we considered the basic question: will they make it? And if they are marginal, what can we do to help them make it?

“My name is Mat,” I said, “and you are—”

“Simon,” he said a low-struggling voice, “and you are Mat?”

“You have been awake, aware,” I said.

“Yes Mat. My mind is as sharp as always. It is the heart that is failing me, along with some other problems,” Simon continued.

"I am told by Sal that you may not make it."

"He's right. I am amazed that I've lived this long," Simon said.

"That was quite a feat you performed back there; shouting like you did—a warning for them, a call for us," Sal said.

"I had to do something, even if it meant my end," Simon admitted.

"Well your decision could not have been more timely, more beneficial to the success of the rescue," Sal continued, expressing appreciation and gratitude with what time remained for Simon.

"So that's why they've been calling me a hero," Simon continued intermixed with coughing and chocking.

"You don't miss much, do you," I said.

We continued our conversation to some length; enough to realize that this man had experienced much in his life and living. *Anger had been his ally.*

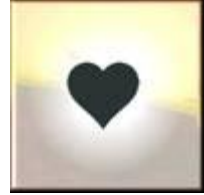
Simon explained: "I had a promising profession that ended as a declared dissident; a long detainment with all its deprivations. Yes, I was angry but "a man who does not know how to be angry, does not know how to be good. ⁷³

"And are you still angry," I asks.

⁷³ Henry Ward Beecher.

IN THE LESSENING

With some choking, he pulled me close, and whispered: "If I am the least good, I must be.... But though I still have anger, I am able to love and to be loved—this I know after many years of doubt." He coughed and choked now in spasmodic succession. "Though my heart is soon to fail me, I know that it will live on—having found eternity in the power to love—even when love seems foolish." Coughing again, he continued: "But there is one with you. He is not one of us, this boy needs love—if it's not too late for him."



IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

Faced with

We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.

- Charles Swindoll

“Sal, who is that boy,” I overheard the leader.

“I don’t know. He fell-in with us at the last resting point. He said he was one of us, but if you don’t know him, then—”

“Get his name and as much information as you can. Let me know what you find out,” the leader continued.

What am I going to do now? If I pull-out, the rouges are sure to do me in; and if I stay, I will have to lie again—anything to make them believe I am not who I am. Then there’s the old man. He’s on to me. After he miraculosuly stood-up and sounded-off, I was sure that they would kill him—not that they wouldn’t have anyway.

“Boy, please help,” was the old man’s plea.

“What is it; what do want from me?”

“Help me up. We’ve got to move, Nark.”

“Move; move where?”

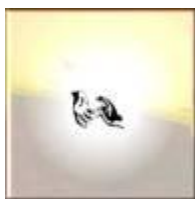
IN THE LESSENING

Here was a defining moment: do I help him or just walk away? I could have convinced the captures that I am here as a plant, on their side, but now with this situation I doubt that even proof would matter. So I did differently this time, choosing to put someone else ahead of myself. "Let's go," as I pulled him up.

"I'm going to need help walking. I am nearly blind, you know," he said as he struggled to his feet.

I just thought he was a lunatic.

"We have the settling fog as our friend," he moaned. "This is good."



"What about the fog?"

"A cloak; it's a shield to protect us in this time of trouble," he mumbled. And he was right; for as visibility came to near nothing, we could creep along. Strange, how the fog worked for our advantage; all the chaos about us, yet seemingly shielded as he described it would be.

"We need to keep moving or will never make—," I said, taking the lead in our escape.

"Yes, I know boy. I'm doing all I can do," as each word seemed a struggle. "If you're afraid and want to run, than go!"

Not this time, I thought. For once, I'm going to hold-stick-it-out. "Don't worry old man, you're safe with me."

IN THE LESSENING

With a look of surprise on his aged face, he replied:
“Oh really?”

Why is it no one ever believes me? The answer is simple I thought, why would they have reason? I don't even believe myself.

“Pick me up; let's keep moving,” the old man ordered.

“Sure, whatever you want, but which way?”

“THE WAY, boy; that's the only way!”

I wasn't sure what he talking about. Why am I trying to help a lunitic?

“Tell me again, old man; which way is ‘the way’?”

“If you seek to learn, than you will know.”

If I seek to learn? “I can't learn if you don't make yourself clear,” I said in a condescending tone.

“You're gonna have to serve somebody.” ⁷⁴

Seek, serve and learn? “Come-on old man. We've got to hurry.”

“Haste won't help,” the old man yelled. “You have to carefully consider every step. You have to look to THE LIGHT.”

Seek, serve, Learn from ‘the Light’?

⁷⁴ Bob Dylan, “Got to Serve Somebody”.

"What light," I asks.

"THE LIGHT illuminates your path. You have to seek it out, embrace it, and holdfast."

His words were beginning to make sense. There is this force, this light; it is mysterious, hidden but from those that seek it out. This light reveals things; things hidden from most—those like me, from METRO.

"THE LIGHT is the only way. THE WAY will help you escape empire."

"Empire," I repeated.

"Yes, empire. METRO is empire."

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

Stubborn hope that

Hope begins in the dark; the stubborn hope that
if you just show up and try to do the right
thing, the dawn will come.

You wait and watch and work: you don't give up.

- Anne Lamott

*This old man still has his wits, more even! He must
be some type of scholar or scientist.*

"I've got to stop and rest," he begged

"Listen old man; if we don't keep going, some of them
may find us, and then you know what happens," I said.

"Do your duty," he demanded.

It was more than ironic; his demand. *When am I going
to free? Who are they that should tell me to do "my
duty"? What do they want from me? Why am I always
on the bottom; they the master and me the servant?*

"Let me rest," he repeated. So I put him down to
rest. Then I began to look for water and maybe
something to eat.

"The fog has left some water," he said anticipating
my action. "The leaves have moisture on them. Get me
some leaves."

Then he went on to describe some plants; things that I didn't know could be eaten, let alone existed.

"It's a blackberry, boy. It grows on a prickly bush. Then there's a similar one, the Mulberry that grows on a tree," he went on.

Definitely a scientist of some kind—maybe a botonist or naturalist. So I continued to listen and learn—if just to get something on my stomach.



"This plant, the leaf, can be boiled," he said, holding a sample in his hands. "It's called Kudzu."

His knowledge and my forging found enough to satisfy our needs. The set-up was almost too good to let go, considering our circumstances: a fire that he made from some plant fuel and a few rocks, a meal composed of some boiled plants and wild fruit; and even some pine needles for ground cover.

It was good; world's away from my world. "That was a good meal old man."

"Yes, it was," he said with some obvious satisfaction.

"You really know how to live, don't you?"

"I know about life and living, yes. I have had to learn out of necessity," he began, "and that much we share in common," he said to me.

What could he possibly know about me?

IN THE LESSENING

"Nature drives us to survive; our conscience, is our guide," the old man continued.

"I thought you said that light guided our way, THE WAY?"

"I did. Our conscience is illuminated by THE LIGHT. The conscience comes at our birth; THE LIGHT helps us to perceive good from bad, right from wrong, love from lust, gratitude from graft and--"

"And helps us escape empire too?"

"Our lives are similar to empire," he continued. "We go through cycles: we have ups and downs, good times and bad; life is a big trip, a journey, with crossroads and obstacles, hills and valleys."

[There are] two handles, We can hold on to [life] with the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith.⁷⁵

"Handles," I said, unsure of what that meant.

"Never mind Nark; before your time," he said impatiently, and he proceeded to explain that one cannot begin to understand another's journey until the one takes the time to get to know the other; that is, if time and place permit. About the best we can do, is start to listen before coming to conclusions, casting judgments or making cutting, critical remarks. "It is more convenient to be critical than to take the time and effort to be correct--therefore, more common to be critical," he added.

⁷⁵ Henry Ward Beecher with some modification.

"Well then; why do you think you know me?"

"I don't know everything about you, but I do know that you're a liar by your learning. You've sold out, and for what; maybe a few pieces of silver," the old man, seemingly without room for doubt or debate.

"You're right; I did sell out,' I admitted. I only wish it was for something as valuable as silver, but I do what I have to do."

"No. You do what is most convenient for you to do—not what you have to do. You choose to lie and to corrupt yourself by example and through influence."

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

Nothing we like

There is nothing we like to see so much as the
gleam of pleasure in a person's eye when he
feels that we have sympathized with him,
understood him.

- Don Marquis (1878-1937); author, humorist

"See, you not only know what I do—but why I do it," Nark fired back. "You say that it takes time, but you make haste in your opinion—and don't do as you say we should do."

"I can see in you some of what I struggled with, in my own young life; when I thought I knew everything about life," I began to explain, pausing for a moment, not sure of what to say or do next, the I continued: "We don't have the time or place to get to know more of the other, but you have sold yourself for even less than you realize. And it is you who foremost bears the costs of your choices."

"What could we possibly share in experience," Nark rebutted. "You can't begin to understand what my life is like—caught between METRO and those half-wit heathens."

I probably said more than I should have at one moment; after all, this boy was not use to such counsel. I should not be surprised by his learned practice of rationalizing his behavior—however bad.

I briefly explained my past; my aspirations to please others. "It took time, but I eventually realized that much of it was a lie—on both sides!" Continuing, I emphathized the point that I know what its like to be lied to, deceived and degraded.

"What did you do then," Nark asks in a calmer, less defensive tone.

"I quit; I withdrew...and eventually resisted. I made a hard decision," as I explained, "and then the charges, my detention and the other things that they do to those who refuse to do for them."

"So that's how our past is similar," Nark remarked.

"Yes, you and I share much more than I think you realize," I said, "but one thing that stands-out is that you have a beautiful face while I, a beautiful mind."

"I'd like to think that I have a mind too."

"I'm not saying you don't; after all, you are a sneaky sort—and that says something. What I mean is—"

"My face is my gift, right?"

"Yes; a gift...that you've abused," I assured him.

He offerred more in the way of his exploits. What happended to him would have happened to anyone young, immersed in deceit: all sense of self worth or value—if they ever had it—begins to decay in the disgust directed toward them and by them to themselves.

Hearing some portion of his story, as he was willing to explain, I continued with my own when the time was right. "They eventually condemned me to indefinite detention and hard labor—as a consequence of my resistance. I had no idea what the future held, other than a slow and painful passing."

"By 'passing' you mean death," Nark asks evidently uncertain of the term.

"No, I mean passing—as in from here to somewhere else; somewhere different," I tried to explain.

"I don't want to die; at least, not here, I've learned how to savor the pleasures that come with power." His comments were commendable; his grasp of what or who he was: not a simple person, but one who knew that compromises and poor choices devalued everything and everyone, most certainly himself.

"Consume, my friend; that's what you do. You consume anything, or anyone, you get your hands on."

"It's true; I do suck the marrow out of bones—"



"But with an insatiable appetite that leaves you choking on the bone," I added to emphasize the end result.

It wasn't as though he didn't understand, that his decisions would be his downfall, but that he thought it didn't matter. *But it does matter; else, he wouldn't fear dying.*

IN THE LESSENING

“Simon, how did you make it; how did you get this far?”

Condensing the answer as one statement, I said: “Eventually, I had to forgive; I had to work-through and accept the things that happened.”

“Does that mean to forget?”

“I didn’t mean forget. Forgive means to basically let go of the past, the pain and punishment—all the things that happened as explained in part.”

“So you just decided to do this...at that’s all there is to it?”

“No; it was not a particular day or decision; it was more like a process of seeking and learning,” I tried to tell him. “It’s not one event or moment, but a series....”

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

Someone who lightens

No one is more cherished in this world than
someone who lightens the burden of another.

- Unknown

“Are you alright?”

“I don’t know, Sal. I am glad that I was here, with you, but I can’t forget what I saw back there—and I never will....”

We had agreed that the time and place was right, but cannot control the natural response to death and destruction. “I need your help,” I said in part to delay any further discussion of the deeper issues paining him right now.

“What do you want,” he said half-heartedly.

“I need you help on behalf of COMMUNITY,” I more or less repeated, drawing attention to our connection.

“What do they want,” he said, grinning.

It was good to see some light-heartedness in Bart; a big positive in light of everything, this experience.

“There is one among us who is not one of us.”

“Do you mean me,” he quipped.

IN THE LESSENING

"No, although you could certainly qualify. No, this is someone else; a young man that has been planted here, among us, to potentially do no good."

"Planted? Oh, you mean a mole or plant," Bart whispered, watching to his left and right.

"Precisely; and it's up to us to carefully manage the matter."

"And how am I to help 'manage the matter'," Bart asks discretely.

So I offered some background, details and such; enough to get him on board.

"I smell a rat," Bart remarked.



"A rat makes for a great meal—the smell rather pleasing if prepared in the right way."

"Maybe so, but I've been around a lot of them and, before you know it, you have an infestation," Bart replied, seemingly unimpressed by the idea of such fine cuisine as roasted rat.

"Well, the good news is that such nests reside elsewhere, in the METRO, so—"

"So I have nothing to worry about, is that what you are saying," he interrupted, anticipating his role as already approved.

IN THE LESSENING

"No. What I am saying is that you have less to worry about than you did before, but you'll have more to worry about if you don't help us now."

Bart shook his head, looking down with a grin, and said: "Okay, I'll help. Where is this rat?"

"Look, he is young and could likely be turned to THE LIGHT with the right care and consideration."

"I doubt it," Bart said bluntly, "but I'll give it a go anyway."

"Simon told us his name is Nark. He also said that this boy should be helped—that he has a chance."

"Nark; what kind of a name is that," Bart said casting doubt. "What makes you think he's a plant?"

"Several things for which I do not have time to explain right now. Let's just credit it to—"

"THE LIGHT; it's that mysterious source of information and insight, right?"

METRO held no such sense of the supernatural; it simply had no room for any other higher being than its own existence. *This is always the end for empire,* I thought, *intoxicated in its own glory.* Not just suicide however; for in it's demise is a sea of destruction and death. That like a laviathan, a beast unparallel, it roams the earth devouring everything

and everyone. "Every empire grows until its reach exceeds its grasp."⁷⁶

"Nark, isn't it," Bart asks as I introduced them.

"Arc is the name, short for Archer."

Simon distinctly told me that his name is Nark, I thought, and I can't accept that his hearing failed him.

"My mistake; a misunderstanding I guess," Bart said, looking at me with confusion.

"Simon may suffer from hearing loss too," I said to try to bring the mistake to closure. *But again, I was sure that Simon had it right. Why the name change?*

"Arc, this is Bart; he will be seeing to your needs."

"The rat" would later tell us why he used "an alias"; Narc hasd connotation of an informite and is short for Narcissism.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ James S.A. Corey, *Caliban's War*.

⁷⁷ Narcissism: the pursuit of gratification from vanity, or egotistic admiration of one's own attributes, that derive from arrogant pride. The term originated from the Greek mythology, where the young Narcissus fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. (Wikipedia)

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

The day came

And the day came when the risk to remain tight
in a bud was more painful than the risk it took
to blossom.

- Anaïs Nin (1903-1977); author, diarist

A dispatch finally arrived giving us news of the rescue attempt; and within minutes, the gathering was called: "We have some goods news: the rescue plan worked as intended. There were some who passed, I must tell you; but the team is well as they return." There was an odd mix of celebration and grief that followed; yet it in all, the stress that had loomed over us was beginning to lift—the weight of anticipation now replaced by the facts of the outcome.

That evening, I went for my usual walk. The sun approaching the hills, the horizon was a mosaic of brilliant, intense color—the transition from day to night where light was giving way to darkness. In my meditation, I had a dream; it was a strange-symbolic vision of some other time and place—beyond my recollection or confidence to comprehend.

The dream began with a birth; the sounds of pain passing into joy...followed by celebration. The surrounding color in the dream consisted of shades of gray ranging from near black to white. As the setting changed from white to black, or light to dark, the

IN THE LESSENING

temperature notably dropped. Complete darkness was chilling, whereas lightness was warm and welcoming.

The moments following birth were warm and wonderful; lightness was present to reveal an intimate connection of care and coddling. But within what seemed like a short time, the scene radically changed; darkness came repidly along with a chill.

The balance of the dream cycled between lightness and darkness, warm and chlll, hope and despair. The care and nuturing that was present at birth would eventually give out or give in. When darkness first appeared, it was simply a shade of gray and a slight drop in the temperature; and in this moment, the mother disappeared—leaving her apparent offspring all alone. *Where did she go; why did she leave*, I thought, as her departure seemed abrupt and alarming. But there was no immediate answer or understanding, but only her return after some unmeasurable time.



Each time she departed, the darkness and cold were more evident, more intense, and her condition more desparate and destitute. This decline paralleled a behavior of increasing impatience, even intolenace—followed by burst of anger, rage and violence. It took its toll on her, on them, on everyone and everything; such that all things once in the light were permanently darkended—the light extinguished forever. I wondered still; *where did she go—and why she keep going—if just to return in such a state?*

IN THE LESSENING

If my feelings were not already intense enough, the mystery of this pattern was finally solved; for what remained of the dream was a revelation of where she went, what she was doing and what would be in her end.

The mother would indulge in sordid affairs; activities adverse to her role, responsibility, life and living. Increasing in intensity with episode, these exploits became daring and dangerous. *It is though she wants to die; yet, she wants to drown in a sea of darkness—but worse—she wants to pull others down in the struggle to withstand her own doing.*

This dream is a revelation symbolic of someone or something whose journey, whether as a result of choice or compulsion, is experienced without apparent conscience or concern—hidden in an internity of some internal conflict—spiraling ever deeper. *Sooner than later, some may say “enough is enough”; and that’s when they are saved from the depths of her doing.*

It has helped me immensely, the dream and its dwelling, to understand my own past; to answer questions that had deeply troubled me. I am thankful that I can dream and see visions and, more so, understand the meaning and purpose.

We pass through the present with our eyes blindfolded. We are permitted merely to sense and guess at what we are actually experiencing. Only later when the cloth is untied can we glance at the past and find out what we have experienced and what meaning it has.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Milan Kundera, *Laughable Loves*.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

Some who were

I have seen great beauty of spirit in some who
were great sufferers.

C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

After we covered the latest dispatches and delivered the much desired news of the rescue, I returned to my other duties. Several hours of physical activity left me hungry and tired; but still, I took a small window of time to walk and to think—for I had been troubled by a dream the night before.

“Wes, will you be joining us at the gathering?”

“Yes.”

The preoccupation with the rescue was now relieved, but to offset it, was this dream. *Why now, why something so deep and disturbing, abstract and allusivew?*

“Oh, and one other question for you, Wes. Are you going to give a word?”

“That’s the plan man,” I replied, still fixated on the details and darkness of the dream.

“I’ll see you then. Enjoy your peace.”

IN THE LESSENING

Peace? Wouldn't that be a pleasure right now. Peace for whom—or from what...and how with the continuous conflict inside and out...?



It was a recurring question, a real puzzle for me; and in the long struggle, I was reminded that “there is no way to peace. Peace is THE WAY.”⁷⁹

But still I am not satisfied. How does peace prevail with so much trouble in us, among us and upon us? Wouldn't it be better to accept that no matter how vigorous or well-intended, the pursuit of peace is impossible, an illusion? *Oh well, I must move on to happy thoughts; to the good news that Simon passed peacefully and that so many survived the rescue.*

From the time I met him to the last, leading-up to his last captivity, Simon persisted in sharing what he had learned along his journey. He thought that his experiences, if shared, would possibly benefit some of us—and he was right and just—regardless of the reaction to his words, his wisdom.

In the delivery of a word, I said of Simon: “He is still among us, I believe. And it would do us all well to never forget him, his words and still more. We cannot know of his journey in detail, but should appreciate what he did for us, each and all, in his last days in body. I know that I will...as I should.”

⁷⁹ A. J. Muste.

IN THE LESSENING

More was mentioned in the message; on the making of peace, as it's called. "He finally accepted that he could not change what had happened, but only accept that it was for good. Simon's last entry in his journal:

It was fear that kept me from making peace; confronting the pain. I wrongly thought that it was pain that I preferred; that in pain, as evident by my anger, I could eventually be justified in my decisions, and in turn, excused of the effects. But in truth, I made a decision for which I knew the possible costs, and must accept not only my part, but the balance of my journey that was and has been THE WAY.

"Simon posted this just prior to his capture and days within his passing. I think it only fitting that you know." *And Simon's last word was my chosen word for the gathering.*

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

No enemy within

When there is no enemy within, the enemies
outside cannot hurt you.

- African Proverb

I briefly explained the reason for our introduction, and the plan going forward. “Arc, for the duration of your time with us, you and I are to stay together. Do you have any questions?”

“Where are we going,” Arc asks.

“We’re going back to COMMUNITY,” I replied, not considering that he would necessarily know what COMMUNITY is.

“And the rogues...,” he inquired.

“If you mean, ‘will they be a problem,’ I don’t know,” I said, speaking honestly. “We take precautions, but we cannot predict—”

“Just asking,” he interrupted.

“Who are you,” I asks, acting on my task of getting as much information as possible.

“I am one of them; but you know that,” Arc repoded,

“Yes, we know; but I mean your past, background.”

"You want to know more," Arc asks seemingly delaying an answer—toying with my task.

"If we understand, we have a better chance of helping you."

"Help, how," he ask as though either unaware of the seriousness of his sitation or the debth of our sentiment. "What if I don't need help," he said more or less delaying an answer.

"But you've already received some help; first from Simon and now from us."

"Okay, if that's what you call it," Arc glibly remarked.

"So you don't think we've helped?"

"Whatever you say, Bart."

"So who are you, besides a rouge?"

"I'm not really a rouge," Arc declared. "Sure, I'm among them, but I really don't want to be."

"Why do it," I asks bluntly.

"Why did you leave METRO," Arc asks, evasive as experience had taught him.

"What's make you think I did?"

"Oh come on, it's obvious," Arc emphasized.

IN THE LESSENING

"I did not leave. I was rescued from a shuttle accident."

"You were helped—," Arc asks as though leading to some point.

"And I still am," I said, using my experience as an example of the depth of COMMUNITY.

"I left METRO because of a burning to see what was out there—and to take it all in," he said as a story began to form.

"How did you know that there was an 'out there'?"

"I had to presume that they were telling me the truth; that my role 'out there' could be very pleasurable and pleasing," he continued.

"And you believed them," I asks, almost as a statement rather than question.

"Isn't that what we're taught all along?"

"You're right. It's just that—," I began.

"Once outside of the METRO, reality begins to surface," Arc finished by statement.

"Exactly," I agreed. "We have that much in common. But how you coped...with reality," I said, probing for more understanding.

"I don't know. I have really questioned who I am—especially since Simon. I was beginning to really hate myself; something so far removed from who I am—of what I had become."

"And now," I asks, careful not to let our conversation end.

"Bart, I definitely hate myself; but then, I have hated for a while now—ever since leaving METRO."

"But you've also learned to love, right?"

"Is that what you call it?"

"Well, what I really mean is that you've experience other feelings—things as never before," I tried to explain based on my limited experience.

"What I was told was not true. I was told that my orders would be rewarding, ridding the region of 'conspirators and collaborators of chaos'."

"A false flag," I murmured.

"False flag," he repeated, "what's that?"

I explained the term; something that Ben mentioned. "History offers countless examples of empire, where a constant enemy or adversary is constructed—a way of promoting continuous conflict, conquest and capital growth."



IN THE LESSENING

IN THE ESCAPE (of a sound plan)

Unite, they can

When spider webs unite they can tie up a lion.

- African Proverb

“Sal, any signs,”

“No; so far so good.”

Our movements had changed; now, instead of speed, we were formed for security: the slower and feeble at center, flanked on all sides by the strong and able.

“Have the flankers been rotating,” I continued

“Yes, the web,” Sal confirmed.

The “web” was our term for a rotation of our guides or peripheral; an added feature of flanking that allowed frequent reporting and, in turn, constant contact between and among the movement.



“How is Bart,” I asks, as a follow-up on his condition and his contact with Archer.

“I think he is challenged with Arc, but I’ll have to get back on that one.”

Bart and Archer had been placed in the front of the movement for a particular reason; whether the young

“rat” is planning anything or not, he is a target for the rouges—that much is understood.

Archer—or whatever his name—has decided on his own to join us. No one forced him; he is here on his own free-will, hung in the balance: on the one-hand is what he had, or knows, and on the other, is us. *The question in my mind, and the risks for us, is what Arc will do now.*

And this is where Sal and I differed as we acted on Simon’s request. I knew Simon from our direct association; a man of many sorrows and suffering—that understandably had taken its toll on his well-being. Sal was not as familiar with Simon, but stood on sacred duty—almost removed from these particular circumstances or conditions.

“Sal, you have to consider Simon, his circumstances,” I said, appealing to his sentiment.

“I know that he suffers, but I have to consider everything. You must understand,” Sal replied.

So I gave Sal the leeway to deal with it as he thinks best; after all:

In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty;
[and] in all things, charity⁸⁰

Again, my routine of inquiry, “What’s the word Sal?”

They’re nearing—a group of several—,” he informed me.

⁸⁰ Rupertus Meldenius, German Lutheran theologian of the 17th century; a second source is Richard Baxter (1615-1691); clergyman.

IN THE LESSENING

"Weapons," I responded immediately—attempting to understand their strength.

"Possibly. We'll do what we can to avoid a confrontation," Sal explained as he signaled us to form-up.

As we passed, the rouges began hurling insults; the volume and vitriol peaking at Arc's passing. Otherwise, they were weak and worn—seemingly incapable of mustering any more than verbal attacks. They had been severaly beaten by, of all things, their very own.

IN THE LESSENING

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IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LIFE (of a loving people)

No man can

...we must have some purpose in life; for no man can live for himself alone.

- Ross Parmenter, anthropologist

Our individual journeys weave in and out of the fabric of a small, loosely tied society. In this metaphor (of a fabric or cloth) is the intent to retain the binding, to not let ends fray too far, if that is possible. To work, or to accomplish our intent, we must be responsible to ourselves and others. Only then can we possibly realize any prospect for freedom.

My belief is that personal freedom cannot grow beyond personal responsibility. The more people that learn to be fully accountable for their lives, the more freedom each of us can enjoy and the more fulfilling all of our lives will be.⁸¹

Miraculously and perhaps supernaturally, we have survived to this day. We rejoice in the rescue; in life and living. Those of us here, as a part of COMMUNITY, are: "But one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."⁸² A web is a highly integrated complex of members that can sustain incredible stresses, natural and even supernatural.

⁸¹ Ross Parmenter, anthropologist.

⁸² Chief Seattle; Leader of Native American Tribes.

“Wes, you’ve met Arc,” Mat asks.

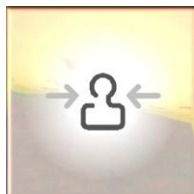
“Oh yes, we have,” I said as I greeted them. “Welcome, once again,” I continued, as we greeted with reservation.

Who is this Archer? Mat tells me that ‘Archer, is probably not his real name. What is he hiding besides his name? Simon knew..., but now its my job to find out.

“You are alone,” I asks, attempting to get right to the areas of concern.

“I am; there is nothing left for me back there,” Archer said, possibly feigning some sentiment.

Could be his training, I thought. A wolf in sheeps clothing?



“Others said that you were despised by the rouges—of what they saw in the rescue.”

“I suppose it is my superiority that got to them. They despised me because of that, I suppose.” Archer replied with few words.

“So being superior, as you put it, was the reason that the rouges turned on you?”

“I think that was it, but it could have been anything. They are barbaric—you know—and will have their way with anyone for pleasure,” he said.

IN THE LESSENING

I have to asks the tough questions—find out who Archer is, and is not. “So the rouges are like wolves,” I asks in my effort to Arc from the rest.

“Yeah, they run in packs,” Arc replied with impatience.

“I see. So you were never—”

“Never with them,” he interrupted, anticipating my interest. “I really didn’t pay attention at first; too caught-up in the sensation and spectacle of it all.”

“Too caught-up in your own interests,” I said.

“Yes, I am very centered on me,” he admitted without shame.

“How has that worked for you?”

“It seemed to work well at first, but over time—”

“I heard....,” I told him.

“It was my arrogance, my attitude, that turned them. I’d have done the same thing,” he said, surprising me once again. “Simon made this matter clear to me. He heard my story and told me my life. He said, ‘fame and fortune has a way of causing us to forget what matters most—who matters, and why.’”

“Sound like Simon,” I said, remembering similar words he had shared with me.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LIFE (of a loving people)

I'll understand

Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand.

- Chinese Proverb

"Eight kilometers," came the word.

"Abby, I am going out to meet them. Would you like to go with me?"

"I don't think so Ben. I've got things to do."

"No you don't. Come, let's go," he persisted.

I know where this is going; he'll hound me until I give in. "Ben, whatever you say."

"I like that response, your choice of words. You should speak to me with such respect on a regular basis; it would work wonders," he explained as we set out toward the team.

"Yes Ben, whatever you say." But in truth, Ben had become a brother to me. We teased and sometimes taunted each other; but it was all with good intentions. More than once, he had been there, for me; and I would like to think that I am the same. Strange that our relationship would remind me of a memory; of my own family, my childhood life and living on the farm.

IN THE LESSENING

My memory is mired in my imagination; not sure what is real or realistic, but only the possibility that it could have happened. I've written and revised a narrative more times that I can count; each time, the details and descriptions, a little different.

As we walked, I could see them. Even more than before was my excitement and elation; feelings that reminded of what a child can experience everyday with relative ease. But here, with Ben, I simply nodded without any sign of my emotions, elation or exhaustion.



"There they are," Ben shouted with excitement.

"Yes, they are," I said, though having spotted them moments before.

And then it all returned; the horrid thoughts of our end; the farm, the family—what mattered most to me was gone forever—and after that was nothing. I went into a hole and vowed to never come-out. *And whether I have altogether come-out or not, sometimes I feel angry and alone; sheltered and secure on the one hand, but lost and forgotten on the other—as though I have buried myself and refuse help either way.*

"Did you hear me," Ben shouted.

"What did you say," I asks, breaking from my deep thought.

Looking frustrated, he repeated: "Watch out for the holes."

"Oh yes, 'the holes'," as I stumped.

But then, there was fording a creek. "These mossy rocks are a real ankle-twister."

"Oh yes; and I have weak ankles as it is," Ben remarked.

"Doesn't surprise me Ben—since you're so weak in mind," I quipped.

"My mind is a bank of intelligence, a monument of mentality, a—"

"Yes Ben, as you say," I interrupted, repeating my previous mockery.

"You've got that right sister."

"Sister? I am your humble servant."

"Doubly right," Ben agreed.

By now, we could make out their faces; it was a sight to behold—so much so that I could not control my feelings, emotions. As I spotted him among the team, tears came to my eyes; excitement and elation as though as a child coming home to the farm and to my family.

My pace picked-up, and soon, I was running.

"Abby, where are you going?"

"Home Ben, I'm going home," I shouted as I made some distance between us.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LIFE (of a loving people)

What we have

We should be determined to live for something.
May I suggest that it be creating joy for
others, sharing what we have...

- Dr. Leo Buscaglia (1924-1998)

Days of uncertainty and doubt were a small price to pay for the satisfaction and success of the rescue. In other times or places, this outcome might have seemed a failure, but not now—such as things are. It is risky, this life and living; but “risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.” *If nothing is worth risking, than life and living is meaningless*, I reminded myself. “The person who risks nothing for noone, has nothing and becomes nothing.”⁸³ “But don’t take this the wrong way,” I would say. This time and place does not: give much, if any, allowance for such, lend well to vanity, leave any room for venality.

“Cal, I am going out and to meet them.”

“Good Ben. And why don’t you ask Abby to join you. I think the walk will do her good.”

“Now there is a cause; the life of Abigail.”

“What about my life, living,” Abby interrupted.

⁸³ Dr. Leo Buscaglia.

"Oh, just muttering Abby; nothing to it, really," I said, caught by surprise. "Hey, I was thinking—"

"Oh no, Ben's thinking," Abby began.

"Yeah right; anyway, I'm going to meet the team and was thinking," with a pause, waiting for another remark.

"You want to no if I want to go," Abby continued.

"Precisely my pet."

"Oh, so I've been promoted to pet," she asks.

"For the most part; but I'm still mulling it over."

"And what kind of pet am I, to be," she continued.

"An obedient one; timid to my talk, trained to my walk," I said, more in jest than serious.

"Nice, I'm a pet for a poet."

"When I call, sit tall. When I move, get in the groove, when I—"

"Ben, when are going to reach puberty," Abby said, in an effort to cut short my unappreciated comedy.

With a deepened voice, I replied, "I am a man."

"In your dreams," she continued.

"No sister, you're the dreamer, and I am the realist," I said in a pseudo-serious tone.

“Realist; and how do you imagine that?”

“I don’t have to imagine it, sister; it’s real. If it’s real than it’s real. It’s the real deal,” I repeated, hoping to add more annoyance.

“Real deal? What drugs are you taking,” she said.

“Not me sister...except for Canabus and coffee, if that counts.”

“No, that’s not it,” she said with confidence. “Ben, you are drugged with toom many chemicals in your brain—of the love variety,” she began.

“The ‘love variety’; oh, you mean dopamine.”

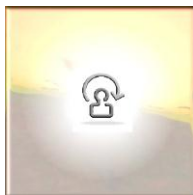
“If that’s what you call it. You’re doped-up on dopamine,” she added.

“But I don’t have a lover.”

“Oh yes you do; it’s you,” she said with emphasis on “you”.

“Me,” I asks, “I an not a narcissist.”

“Yes, you; you’re in love with yourself, just like the Greek dude.”



“You mean Narkissos,” I said, attempting to impress her.

“Exactly. You must spend hours Nar-kissing yourself,” she said, evidently unimpressed....

IN THE LESSENING

"That's not true as far as you know. Maybe a few minutes of passion, but not any more," I said, more at play than anything else.

"See, I knew it; you love yourself," she persisted.

"And don't you, love yourself," I said, half-serious.

The expression on Abby's face had suddenly changed; that which was witty and become withdrawn; still, she stuttered, "No Ben, I don't...."

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LIFE (of a loving people)

When we get

When you get in a tight place and everything goes against you, till it seems as though you could not hold on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.

- Harriet Beecher Stowe

Don't expect this to end. Evil is not exclusive to METRO. We're not immune from this evil as you know; still, we have THE WAY to keep love alive, to keep-on keeping on. So what do you do? You grieve, each in your own way, for those who are gone. You can accept and absorb the losses, or you can give-up, give-in or give-out. Such thoughts and statements are common, even expected, in the time and place we live. It not the admission to the possibility or the presence of apathy that is the problem. Honesty is indeed for the best. The problem is when it becomes pervasive, leaving no room for love. *And without love, where is hope and life?*

Helen Keller was blind from early childhood, but studied not far from here. She said:

We may have found a cure for most evils; but we have found no remedy for the worst of them all, the apathy of human beings.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Helen Keller.

IN THE LESSENING

So it is still with us, and though we may want it to go away, it holds us—sometimes to point of strangling us as like those unplanned pests that persists in the gardens and find their way into our bedrolls. *But even pests can be of value.*

In our return from the rescue, we ran into some stragglers; those who did us harm. Earlier, at the racetrack, they looked the part of their reputation, rough and ready; but now they were just human, like us. And for a moment, I was sympathetic toward them—aware of their own suffering. *How could I have sympathy when what I wanted was revenge?* Because my fears had subsided. But don't misunderstand me; my heart was still heavy in our losses, then and now. But I no longer was afraid of what they would do. I'm not blind to the possibility, even certainty, that they will continue. But I was not responding to the past or the future, but only this place and time in which the tide had turned.



But even in such moments, you might not be with us, saying to yourself: "But its only 'a moment', and has no bearing on the future...and what they will do or can do." Or you might think or say: "Our suffering is of little effect because our sacrifice means nothing to METRO." But even if this was your saying and were right, it is righteousness that matters more in life and living—even if our suffering or sacrifices seem of no account or effect.

"But how do they live?"

IN THE LESSENING

I met one of them. He said that most live in fear, while a smaller number, in cynicism. He would agree with Simon; that the vision was merely to placate the many and empower the few—and so goes an important lesson of history, once more.

But what about us; what about now, and still to come? Should we just give-up, give-in or give-out? *That is a question that I wrestle with most of the time; and particularly right now, in the consequences of a credible cause and safe escape.*

A great historian said:

Apathy can be overcome by enthusiasm, and enthusiasm can only be aroused by two things: first, an idea, which takes the imagination by storm, and second, a definite intelligible plan for carrying that idea into practice.⁸⁵

So is it “ideas” and “plans”; is that the sure cure for the ailment called apathy? Or is it something more?

⁸⁵ Arnold J. Toynbee, British historian, philosopher of history, research professor.

IN THE LESSENING

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IN THE WORLD (of the many few)

Lessons come

The road of life twists and turns and no two directions are ever the same. Yet our lessons come from the journey, not the destination.

- Don Williams Jr.; novelist, poet

I am torn between two worlds; the new found place called COMMUNITY and the one I have grown to know.

Wes is now my guide; he spends time with me and has discussed the ways—THE WAY. Their ways are found in light; not natural or artificial light, but some sort of supernatural stuff that is strange to me. But I don't know: not that COMMUNITY is better for me, but whether being better is what I really want. Just trying to honest for a change; might as well, since that is what they expect.

"I don't think so," I told Wes. But he has a keen sense; he seemes to know when I am lying or withholding. Sometimes I give in, own up to it; but other times, I end-up lying about lying—which only makes me more a fool and the others, more frustrated.

I miss the action and thrill of it. Sure, I was threatended, treated as worthless; but that's not as bad as being beaten or jailed, like Simon. What can say except that being bad has its benefits—even if the costs sometimes made me so low.

IN THE LESSENING

Wes says that my feelings need time and thought; that time will tell what is more important—what matters most.

“Arc, this isn’t something that can happen over night. You have been conditioned to a way that is not THE WAY, but it is your way, right now.”

“My way, your way, the way? What difference does it make? You think that I always get my way,” I shouted.

“I am not making myself clear. What I mean is that your experience and environment was METRO, POLITIC or something like it. This place is not....”

“I know that it’s definitely not; it’s not even close,” I added. “And there’s the problem.”

“The problem? Just one,” Wes said.

“Okay, I have problems, maybe more than I realize, but what I mean is that I don’t think I want to be here,” I continued to explain.

“Sometimes I don’t want to be here either,” Wes admitted.

“You don’t? But I thought—,” I said, shocked.



“I love COMMUNITY, but I don’t always like it; so in other words, I sometimes feel the desire to just pack-it-in and head back to the coast of the great waters—what’s left of it—to be close to family.”

"So it's about the scenery, isn't it? More a flatlander, are you?"

"No, if only it was that simple; but I use this example to suggest that I too have my own desires, my way, and my notions—just like you," Wes explained.

Wes was not that much older; as any young person, he had a call of nature like me; the kind that youth struggles to resist. I did not consider this then, at the time of the conversation because, as another of my problems, I was or am totally absorbed, in me.

"Several of us are going to forage this tomorrow. I would like you to be a part of that," Wes said.

"Forage; do you mean collect food," I said, as though it was beneath me.

"Yes, that too. They will show you," he added. "There is plenty to do here, it seems. Nothing is overlooked. Even children play a part. Oh, and you were mentioned in the dispatches; not by name, of course, but by way of Bart; he is concerned."

"Really; Bart concerned about me," I asks.

"Yes Arc. Bart has come far; he really cares," Mat began to explain.

"Well tell him thanks; tell him that I am well, that I am better than I was—better than before. You tell him this," I said, trying to appear confident.

IN THE LESSENING

“I will do that Arc, but only if you take the time to tell him yourself; it’s how we do things in COMMUNITY, it’s THE—”

“THE WAY,” I interrupted, still confused over this whole life and living thing.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE WORLD (of the many few)

To reach for

Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.

- Harriet Tubman (1820-1913); abolitionist,
humanitarian

We celebrated into the night; they were home and we were together again. It was a moment to remember; and especially in times when give-in or give-out.

Bart was so happy to see us that he ran-up, stretched-out his arms, and expressed his emotions with tears. In my own wanting, I opened myself to him with arms and with that, my heart. I cried too. I cried for the first time in a long time; and still now, as I wake this morning, have tears welcoming me to another day.

Was I the same person as yesterday or before? I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything.⁸⁶

I could hear Ben approaching outside my shanty; apparently, he found some one else to enlighten and was letting it fly. But the ill-feeling that usually accompanied his arrival did not show itself this morning. Perhaps I was so overwhelmed by the flow of

⁸⁶ Harriet Tubman; abolitionist, humanitarian.

tears that it could not wake up; for on this day, I felt as though a hundred Bens could not dampen my spirit. *This is a moment like no other.*

"You look lively this morning," he said.

"I feel lively, as though life and living has brought a new day; a day like no other," I replied.

"Oh really," Ben said in a rare, brief expression.

"Yes, and before you go prodding me for the reasons, just accept and appreciate that I told you. I know you Ben; your sneaky ways of rattling my chain."

"Time-out sister! I am not going to rain on your parade. I am happy that you're happy. I'm cool with it," Ben explained, evidently sympathetic.

"Thank you Ben," I commented, "for being considerate and understanding."

"You're welcome; and besides, a severe storm is on the way; it has taken top billing." Ben added with emphasis.

"What kind of storm?"

"Too early to tell," Ben replied. "It may pass by without much effect, but we don't know yet. Cal will let us know as details develop," he tried to reassure me.

"So should I just go on about my routine for the day, is that it?"

"I don't think you were doing that to begin with; from where I stand, this day is very special for you—nothing routine, is what I mean," Ben clarified.

"From where you stand, Ben, you are quite right; this day began with tears for which you alone are aware. I have finally begun to feel again, after years of drought, and it is a wonderful release."

"That is good news Abby. I knew you were very troubled by the past, what happened in time before—"

"This is my journey Ben," I said more or less stating what he knew already.

Ben was being unusually caring this morning; as though he too had been moved by yesterday's return. As it was, he was like family, like the brother I never really knew. Ben had his own daily routine; things planned and obligated to do. But before leaving, shared these words in a note:

Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice, but for those who love, time is eternity.⁸⁷

And with the note in hand and in heart, I went about my day; first to the garden for some tending and then to the kitchen for preparation.

⁸⁷ Henry Van Dyke; Author, educator, clergyman.

IN THE LESSENING

Others seem to be aware of the glow I projected—and whether they knew of any details or not. They would smile and say something positive like, “You look happy”, or “You have a real glow about you”, or other similar comments such as, “Abby. You are different this morning; as though you’ve seen an entirely new day.” Even some of the children, more at ease to speak their mind, asks me what had happened. I smiled and said: “I am very happy today; happy with the same excitement that you exhibit nearly every day. I feel like a kid.” They might look puzzled or confused, if they even comprehend. But for others; they might nod to indicate that they somehow understood—though without speaking or expressing their own feelings. For even younger people had possibly experienced a similar moment when a planted seed germinates, grows, blooms and blossoms for all to behold. *I just hope this one is a perennial.*



IN THE LESSENING

IN THE WORLD (of the many few)

There is

In the final analysis, there is no other solution to a man's problems but the day's honest work, the day's honest decisions, the day's generous utterance, and the day's good deed.

- Claire Booth Luce (1903-1987); playwright, editor, social activist

From time to time, we do receive news from beyond this region; and even less so, from somewhere beyond the shores of what we know as the great waters. We knew that other lands were in turmoil, as the effects of THE LESSENING were spread far and wide. The earth was changing in a radical way—at a radical rate—all of which occurred in an age of unprecedented technological advancements. There were the signs, the warnings of such possibility. One noted scientist said:

I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction.⁸⁸

And whether he ever realized the root of his fear, what was dreaded at the time would eventually occur and, by some measure, remains with us, around us. What happened before can happen again when we fail to consider and reconsider the consequences and cyclical nature of history.

⁸⁸ Albert Einstein.

IN THE LESSENING

My place is small and insignificant, but it is certainly my place to think, to think about these things and, if THE WAY provides, to do more than just think about history. “History teaches us that the capacity for things to get worse is limitless.”⁸⁹

We did “do more”, of course, in partnering in the rescue; and I thought we did more in extending COMMUNITY to those who stood against us. *There is no other way to be; such is this time and place: taking risks is a daily consideration, a certainty for us.*

Among the things that we know, of what “happened before”, was that common good gave way to other uncommon interests; and what had been a good idea was destroyed in unchecked power and possession; and eventually,

The oppressed [could] never free themselves—they [did] not have the necessary strengths.

So what could they do? Well, many suffered and died, seemingly unable to do any more; while a few—that did survive placed their hopes on a vision that began with what Simon had shared in his later years. But over time, some of these who did believe fell into disbelief and despair—having realized that the vision was a ruse—they gave-in and gave-out. We all remember that Simon was among them; he paid dearly for his falling, as did others. It was a dark time; another dark age.

Our region is very different now; the difference could be not be measured in just one aspect alone,

⁸⁹ Chalmers Johnson.

IN THE LESSENING

but has to include everything that describes and defines a nation-state.

Internal pressues continued to rise as more of the population was dealt less. As hope for a shift disappeared, so too did order and civilty. *When a person or people lose everything, they loose it.*

And whether this condition was created in a sort of systematic way is of little import in view of the consequences, the effect of complete collaspe. *Nothing can be done for that which is totally undone, so they believed.*

Oh, there were other signs too, and not just the loss of hope, but these came later; after the already mentioned had affectively assured an end of all ends that meet. These "other signs" were above and beyond "the end"—as even the rise of what metaphorically was an indomtiabile *beast in the east.*

While here, on this landmass, too much had happended to make any difference within, let alone beyond, what is called "region". The masses had lapsed into mediocrity as one more step in the death of empire.

Some speculated that the subsequent signs were systematic—engineered and imposed ultimately by the few with power and possesion. *But to seriously consider this thinking, you would have to believe that technology could control nature, high and low, and would have to accept that the decline was not merely nature's uncontrolled occurences.*

*They would have to comprehend that a series of contagion—understood as more deadly than the Black Death—was distributed in some purposeful order.*⁹⁰

But even more inconceivable were the events from up above; the appearance and then effect of celestial chaos—that made man fear as perhaps in ancient times of climatic change. *Had man reached such power and possession that the heavens and its content could be controlled?* Such signs could be, could have been, the fulfillment of ancient history; the long-predicted *last days* of this phase of planet earth. But whether created by the Creator or the created, these signs rendered a once predominate nation-state to utter ruin, high and low, far and wide.



But if this record of what happened is not bad enough—could it happen again? So I think to begin with, and do as I am led to continue so.

What remains are: the forces of nature that, with observable and mysterious power, might eventually restore that lost by nation-states of man to that gained by a healthy state of nature; and the supernatural forces that, with observable and mysterious power, might eventually restore and return the created to the Creator.

⁹⁰ One of the most devastating pandemics in human history, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 75 to 200 million people and peaking in Europe in the years 1348-50 (Wikipedia).

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE WORLD (of the many few)

There will always be

There will always be a frontier where there is
an open mind and a willing hand.

- Charles F. Kettering; inventor, engineer

The sunset exposed the low lands in a strange combination of yellow and brown; something like sepia. a brownish hue that accentuated the landscape, the details of nature.

Dispatches were now regular, life and living returning—; though not with the light of my friend, Phil.

“Cal, did you have other questions?”

“No. Everthing has been covered, Sal. We’re just glad to have you back in one piece. Oh, there is another thing: how is Bart doing? He said he had something really pressing him; that he needed to talk with me, but he didn’t say why.”



“I think what he wants to talk about is more of someone,” Sal began. “Bart and Abby seem to have an interest beyond friendship; a courtship seems to be blooming.”

“Really? Well I didn’t see that one coming.”

“Neither did they,” Sal said with a smirk.

"I think I have everything I need," I said. *Well this is goods*, I thought. *The bond of two is always delightful news—as with the the arrival of a child.*

"You wanted to see me," Bart asks as he approached.

"I thought it was you that wanted to see me," I managed to say with a big grin on my face.

"This is little awkward, but I thought I should tell you that Abby and I have feelings," Bart opened.

"Is that so? When did this happen?"

"It's been happening for a while. I think it really started the day we met, when she took me around; it just seemed to grow from there," Bart began.

"So how much has it grown, these feelings?"

"It is powerful; so much so, that I spend my waking hours thinking of her and wanting to be near her. When I do see her, it's as though for the first time. My heart leaps with joy and I have a real peace and comfort," he continued.

"And how does Abby feel about it?"

"She tries to be discrete. She is much better than I at hiding her feelings; especially in the company of others. But when she catches me alone, well—"

"I get the picture Bart."

"What should we do," Bart asks, seeking my advice.

"Sounds like you doing a lot already," I quipped, "but what I suggest is some discussion with the both of you; first each of you, then both of you."

I was reluctant to express my opinion, but I was aware the METRO no longer practiced such bonding rituals. Children were not the product of such relationships, but were produced by other means—all of the methods of selective breeding, genetic engineering and eugenics. "Bart, there is one other matter in this news; a probing question, but important still." I knew that sterilization was also instituted in METRO and, being a proletariat, that Bart was likely included. "Can you produce children," I asks, because Abby would need to know.

"I actually brought that up to her already. Neither of us are fertile; both of us were—"

"That's all I needed to know. I am sorry that you cannot, but that would not stop you from fulfilling this much-needed role among the children present or to come. We all make a contribution, as you've seen, as parents and guardian."

"Abby and I have talked about this as well. We know that we can continue together as she has been so supportive all along," Bart explained.

"I guess this means that you've decided to stay, permanently," I added.

"Yes, that is what I decided—what we have decided," Bart told me with emphasis on "we".

IN THE LESSENING

“And what if you two decide not to—”

“I know how I feel, and I think I know how she feels; but as to us, I can only say that my desire is to be here, with COMMUNITY, and to be with her as her companion,” he continued, evidently to convince me of his desire.

“Very good then; the decision made, the bond forming, this is good news.”

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE THREAT (of a coming storm)

That can gather

I love the man that can smile in trouble; that
can gather strength from distress and grow
brave by reflection.

- Thomas Paine; scholar, intellectual, writer

I woke abruptly from the dream. *Not again.* Sitting-up, I wiped the sweat and tears from my face. *I can't go on like this,* I realized. *I've got to speak to Mat; let him know that I've got to go.*

At an early hour, I approached his shanty. "Mat, I need to speak to you."

"Huh, is that you Wes." Mat asks in his slumber.

"I'm sorry Mat, but I had to see you before I--"

"You're leaving?"

"Yes, I've go, to bring closure to this--"

"We all know how it is. You just can't stop and pretend it doesn't exist."

"I had the dream again; the same one," I told Mat. I still miss those I loved who are no longer with me but I find I am grateful for having loved them. The gratitude has finally conquered the loss.⁹¹

⁹¹ Rita Mae Brown (born 1944); writer.

IN THE LESSENING

Mat stopped, realizing that I needed to prepare and be on my way. "Not that I need to remind you of this; the threat of the coming storm."

"I know, and am planning for that: I know my travel to the coast could be delayed or worse."

Mat did not have to explain, since he had done so before. "Be on the way."

"What about Arc," I asks.

"No fear Wes, we've got that covered," Mat reassured me. "He is in good hands."

"I was going to leave a note, explaining my sudden action," I suggested.

"Does he know anything about—," Mat began to asks, wondering if Arc was aware of my intentions.

"I have shared much of it, but not everything. Still, I think he'll understand in some way."

"You will be missed," Mat said as he hugged me. "May THE WAY lead you there, and then, back to us."

All duties and responsibility taken care of, I packed my things. In a note to Arc:

Courage is about doing what you're afraid to do.
There can be no courage unless you're scared.⁹²

⁹² Eddie Rickenbacker (1890-1973); medal-of-honor recipient.

IN THE LESSENING

Traveling alone is a double-edged sword; on the one hand, you are less trackable to MATI, but on the other are more vulnerable to POLITIC . Some might call my decision courage, others as careless, but what I call it is compulsion from a conviction.

Mat knew the risks but seemed to lay his better judgment aside. This was a hard decision for all of us—with or without the coming, natural storm. In some sense, I was already in the storm—and had been for as long as I had fled the coast. Now, in the irony of a coming storm, was I similarly in flight; ideally, to bring this chapter of my life to close. But beyond current events, were the environmental conditions on the coast. These conditions had left some areas a nuclear wasteland; practically uninhabitable—a zone of permanent death and destruction. Those whom I was trying to reach were supposedly outside of the impact zones—though they had good reason to believe otherwise.



What I would later learn—and understood now—was that this assault was a first strike aimed at specific, military targets in and beyond these regions. Long-range weapons were launched from offshore and, for reasons I do not understand, arrived undeterred by supposed defenses or countermeasures. But this was not the first use of such weapons with large and long-term effect. In fact, this region was the first to use such: in a twist of such events, this nation-state was receiving what they had dished-out decades earlier. What I

IN THE LESSENING

cannot forget—what we should never forget—is that such technology, its use, ushered in a age where:

It is perfectly obvious that the whole world is going to hell. The only possible chance that it might not is that we do not attempt to prevent it from doing so.⁹³

⁹³ J. Robert Oppenheimer, physicist-director of the Manhattan Project.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE THREAT (of a coming storm)

What has happened

Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.

- William James; psychologist, philosopher, author

“Wes woke me up in this morning. As you know, he had been concerned about family living on the coast, so I was not surprised when he told me that he was leaving,” I began to explain at the gathering. And on delivering this news, I moved-on to the matter of the coming storm.

“As to the storm, We must prepare now. Our sources tell us that it may not reach us, but we must plan and prepare for the worse.”

COMMUNITY was agile; willing and able to adjust to threats of this kind. We were all concerned, but we were also conditioned to do what we must do.

“Planning may include relocation; and with that possibility, we have pinpointed some higher-ground with natural shelter. This location mmay be shared with our neighbors to the west. Food stores and other provisions will be movede on the possibility that our stay could be prolonged, even permanent.”

IN THE LESSENING

“One of our information sources is METRO; their activity and apparent action confirms the seriousness of this storm. As you probably know, METRO is a magnet for storms; the electrical discharge attracts polar opposites—as kind of bond—that literally draws the storm to this location. Even so, METRO is well prepared and protected. We however...” This was nothing new for COMMUNITY; we knew the life—most of us being old enough to endure some phase of THE LESSENING. “So steady is the word; be calm, careful, cautious—but don’t let concern get the better of you,” I advised. “Any questions or comments to this point,” I followed.

And with a moment, I continued: “We begin our activities today, and continue over the next several days, with multiple movements each day. All unnecessary tasks will be deferred, if possible, as we carry-out our plan and relocate. As to...”



As the days neared for the storm, dispatches would stop. COMMUNITY would have to depend entirely on our own for local information; and with that, we would maintain scouts in the area much like the web used in our recent return.

“We all know what we have to do and when it needs to be done. As more information is received and reviewed, we will pass it on. Again, questions and comments.”

We always tried to distinguish the fine line between fact and fiction, the confirmed and conditional. It is one thing to be remiss, but another to purposely mislead, to abuse trust. As doubt occurs however, this effect happens; trust is breached or broken. Mistakes are excusable, but deceit is another thing. I am not suggesting that we are beyond deceit. Oh no, we are not exempt from the deliberate, destructive ways of deceit. "We have not come that far," I would say to remind myself of our weaknesses.

"Arc, with Wes on travel, I will be your guide."

"Whatever, Mat," Arc said with indifference.

There is growing tension; an understood or accepted ocean of urgency with an undertow of fear. This is not avoidable; it is natural and if used effectively can be a great force for good. Some had learned this fear, practiced it, but the reaction or response to fear remains inconsistent for the basic reason that we remain imperfect. *We sometimes flounder in a tide of imprecise information and unfamiliar waters.*

Arc is an example of the least "learned", the furthest from the others that "practiced it". *He looks lost because he is.... But he is too unlearned to understand that that he is lost—which is the biggest problem of all.*

Human history bears-out the trait to believe the best; and by "best", I mean that which pleases—which gives cause that our wants and will can be realized whether realistic or not. Such thoughts and thinking is directed strictly at self and its satisfaction.

IN THE LESSENING

COMMUNITY is susceptible; it can fall prey to self, such self-centeredness and gratification. In this temptation is an insight and instruction:

The world we see that seems so insane is the result of a belief system that is not working. To perceive the world differently, we must be willing to change our belief system....⁹⁴

⁹⁴ With some omission and modification, from William James; psychologist, philosopher, author.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE THREAT (of a coming storm)

Greatness is

One of the largest tributaries of the River of Greatness is always the stream of adversity.

- Cavett Robert; founder of National Speakers Association

"As to the coming storm, we are going to begin our relocation," I told Sal and Ben.

"What about you, Cal; do you have the strength," Sal asks, attentive to Cal's health condition. His question was founded; I had been ill for awhile, the effects gradually worsening.

"I have thought about this, certainly on more occasions than this one, but to answer the question now; I will not be going with you," Mat replied. These two were more aware of my illness than others; all knew of my illness—it was obvious—but details had been kept close for reasons that I thought best for COMMUNITY. It may seem hypocritical, my decision to withhold details of my personal health; after all, my role as leader is about setting a good example. But if I do not know my own chances, I cannot expect them to understand. "I know that you know (of my illness)," I had said at least once to each and to all. "But remember: 'The greatest enemy of any one of our truths may be the rest of our truths.'" ⁹⁵

⁹⁵ William James; psychologist, philosopher, author.

IN THE LESSENING

And more than once, they had individually or together, conveyed their concern with care. So I am at peace on this matter, of my health and what I know and they know.

Sal had been in transition; trained and equally experienced—if not more—he would likely take the helm in my impositon and passing. So the announcement of my replacment was accepted and acknowledged in anticipation.

“We have begun the relocation, combining our food stores with that of the others,” Ben told me.

“Good. So everything is in order,” I ask, more a statement than a question.

“Order is relative, of course, but we think we’re making good progress,” he replied. “And what about you, Cal?”

“I am glad for the preparation and progress. I am proud of you Ben,” and with a pause, I asks: “Have you seen Mat?”

“Oh yes, I made it a point to join him at the fire so to speak, if I don’t find more time to catch-up.”

“And what about Wes; any word on his travel?”

“No, nothing; but then again, we’re not getting any information except from our local scouts.”

“And how is Abby holding-up in all this chaos?”

"She is probably doing better since, with preparation for the storm, I have stopped my lecture series—which can only mean solitude and satisfaction for her," Ben explained.

Sensing his sarcasm, I added: "Yes, we have that to be thankful for."

"But she is happy; happier than I've ever seen her," Ben continued on a more serious note.

"Good to hear. We all like happiness whether we think so or not," I said with equal wit.

"Your 'lecture series'; is that what you call it?"

Somehow, in the depths of my broken body, I still found a way to turn attention toward others, their well-being and whatever else that still mattered. "Ben, it's about love...Abby's happiness. She has found love. She is happy in love," I said.

"Love? I didn't know it was lost," Ben quipped.

"You are a piece of work," I remarked.

"Just a piece," Ben promptly replied.

In the days to come, and with food stores combined, COMMUNITY would relocate while I remained here to either wait it out the passing storm or pass altogether. *I am neither sad or glad, but at peace.*

The pain that began as a moment (years ago) had gradually gained strength. And too deal with this (pain), I had been using a Cannabis extract; a naturally-derived drug that had worked well for us in treating a variety of prolonged moods and maladies. I had wrestled with this; my decision to use such medicine on the concern that it would dull my senses and render me ineffective. But over time, and with the cycles of increasing pain, I found these medicines to be overall effective for me and for the others. It was never a certainty but rather consideration to what seemed better in each case and its circumstance, that led me to such conclusions.

Any medication can be abused in some way, whether through lack of knowledge or for other reasons. We always try to be conscious of such; weighing the options and then doing what we believe is best overall.

When the outcome falls below our desire or determination, the cause(s) are examined and explored. Greatness is not our goal, but if it were, it would probably require Ben's lecture series to understand:

There is no greatness where there is no simplicity, goodness and truth.⁹⁶

The extract is a good, natural pain reliever. If anything, it has helped me keep my head-not lose it-and for that I am most grateful.



⁹⁶ Leo Tolstoy.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE BEAUTY (of a waiting meadow)

Something felt

Beauty is an experience, nothing else... It is something felt, a glow or a communicated sense of fineness.

- D. H. Lawrence

Maybe it's a sign, I thought as I looked at the full moon. My mind was in overload, flooded with thoughts; so much so, that I could not relax. *Is it the coming storm or is it more about her, about us and the future*, he wondered as he pulled himself up.

These days had been so fine and fulfilling; like none that I could ever remember—as though I have been transformed as a person I never knew—or could have imagined. *I do not want it to end; but what will become of him, of us*, she thought as she caught herself regressing back.

I couldn't sleep, so rather than continue wrestling with thoughts and bedding, I got up. "Time for a walk, a moonlight walk," and so he did.



"Hello Mr. Moon," she spoke, peering from her shanty. "You are casting some sort of spell on me, aren't you? You're light and shadows, drawing me from my shelter and security to walk and talk," she said as she got up.

IN THE LESSENING

This reminds me of the rescue, walking in the dark. The first time I did know what to do, but had a guide; this time, the opposite. I guess I'll just follow THE LIGHT, he reasoned as he left his shanty.

"It's been a while, but a walk would do me good," she said to the moon, as she set-out. *Off I go to a special time and place, to see what is calling me.*

For after what seemed no time at all, I was near a lovely meadow; a place that held a mystic and magical quality about it. *This is a place of dreams; a place for which I could dream good things,* he thought as he took sight of it all.

In the distance was the meadow; illuminated in the moonlight were the colors of the floral, tiny dots of pastels in the background of greens and darker shades. *This place is magical too,* she thought to herself as felt pulled into it.

The smell of the plants, life and living, was more pleasurable at this moment; the floral, the greenery, the earth and all its offspring. *A wonderful idea, this walk,* he thought as his senses took it in.

As I neared the meadow, the high grass danced with my body and, with outstretched arms, tickled my hands. *I was not the least bit afraid but felt completely at home, at peace—as I had so desired,* she would journal later. *I am glad I came, even at this hour; for if I had not, what I would have missed would have been so mysterious as to not believe it.*

IN THE LESSENING

The sounds of early morn; the music of that naturally made but with a meaning and melody that has its own place. What makes those sounds; all those sounds that seem to harmonize in some way, he thought.

Fog is rolling in and, as though alive, it is drawing me more into this meadow. The more I try to move, the less I am able; the coming fog holds me suspended—unable to move further—as though I want to runaway, but can't, she continued.

A dampness comes over me; not that which is cold and chilling, but is warm and refreshing—like taking off a garment after the heat of the day. *It is neither too warm or too cold, but it is right in every way—a sensation of rapsady, relief and respite,* he thought.

Not too far away, I hear wrestling; it is something, or maybe someone. *Who would be out here now,* I thought with both wonder and weary. *Maybe its just a rodent or reptile. Help me, it may be a rouge,* she would later write on that moment.

Who's that, I wondered as a spotted a silhoutte; “Abby,” he spoke with near disbelief.

“Yes Bart, it is,” she said, thinking that it must be a dream.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE BEAUTY (of the waiting meadow)

Love, be loved

To love someone deeply gives you strength.
Being loved by someone deeply gives you
courage.

- Lao Tzu (600-531); philosopher

We go for walks and talks with each other, each passing day; so that we are more of each other.

We care about each other and about us; so much now, that I realize our differences as she cares about what I have to say [about our differences].⁹⁷

"Where is she," came a voice.

"I am waiting for her," I said with a determined tone.

"Why wait for her; why not go to her," the voice said.

"I came to see these beautiful things while I wait for one even more beautiful. I wait for beauty because beauty is worth the wait," I explained.

"But how long will you wait," the voice again.

"As long as I should," I said, determined still.

⁹⁷ From Brendan Francis: "A man is already halfway in love with any woman who listens to him."

"How long is 'long'," the voice persisted—as though doubting my expressed intentions.

"Longer than you would understand," I replied, frustrated that my intentions were in doubt.

"Longer than—," the voice repeated.

"Yes, as long as my mind can imagine," I shouted to emphasize my cause.

"Your mind can imagine," the voice asks, attempting to irritate more.

"I can imagine. I imagine being here now; waiting, for her to meet and to hold me. I imagine this and so much more."

"The more you imagine, the more unlikely it will be," came the menacing voice.

"Unlikely or not, it is wonderful to imagine; to believe—even in the inconceivable."

"It may seem wonderful but it is tragic," that voice continued.

"No, you don't understand; I am happy to imagine now as opposed to then; to be waiting, yes, but to see this to the end."

"That was sweet; it sounds like a Shakespearian soliloquy."

"A Shakespearean soliloquy," I asks, half-hearted.

IN THE LESSENING

"It has a nice rhythm and rhythm, like a sonnet," the voice said, seemingly as a compliment.

"It does, doesn't it," I agreed with some sense of my muse.

"Are you a poet or romantic; or do you just imagine," the voice continued.

"I am who I am; I do imagine and, evidently, I can make rhythm and rhythm," I said boldly.

"She will like that," the voice declared.

"Like what," I asks, pretending not to know who the voice was referring to.

"She will like your sonnets. She will like your words, the way in which you express yourself."

"I am not too sure; as it is, I am slow to speak and, when I do, sure to say something superficial or stupid," I replied, insecure in such skills.

"So you've tried," the voice challenged me.

"No, not really?"

"Well, you either have or have not. Let me guess, you imagined...", the voice returned with sarcasm.

"Yes, I did imagine, then I rehearsed by words, and then—"

"And then you fell flat on your face," the voice said, evidently to humiliate me.

"Okay, I failed—not exactly flat, but hard."

"And you're sore, aren't you," the voice asked.

"Yes, I feel some pain," I admitted that much.

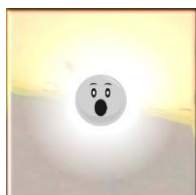
"Listen to you; more musing."

"Yes, I can form the words, but I just don't have the courage to—"

"Try again? You love to imagine and to wait, but you hate to fail, don't you," the voice asked again.

"Don't you; doesn't anybody?"

"What I mean is that you don't want to lose what you believe that you have, do you," the voice continued.



"I guess it's true, though I don't really know the difference between that and failure," I said, somewhat confused.

"The two are similar, I grant you that; but you cannot fail if you have not completely won. Don't you see," the voice tried to reason with me.

"Not really, but help me. When will I completely win," I asked with earnestness.

"Only when you no longer fear."

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE BEAUTY (of the waiting meadow)

Love gives

Love never reasons but profusely gives; gives,
like a thoughtless prodigal, its all, and
trembles lest it has done too little.

- Hannah More (1745-1833); writer

I don't know which is more intense; my desire or my dread. Will this work, will love stay; will our promise always play?

But love...is a constant state of anxiety, a battlefield; it's sleepless nights, asking ourselves all the time if we're doing the right thing. ⁹⁸

"Where is he," came a voice.

"He is waiting for me, I am sure."

"Waiting for you, is he? And you're sure, are you?"



"As sure as sure can be, I said, shaking in my sudden uncertainty.

"You don't sound sure," came the same voice.

"I do struggle," I admitted to the voice.

"Why do you struggle; why are you unsure?"

⁹⁸ Paulo Coelho, *The Witch Of Portobello*.

"Because no one can be completely sure; this, I have learned from life and living," I confessed.

"I can argue with you on that score; you're right woman, life and living in this place is not without shaking. But if he waits, as you think, why," the voice spoke, both condoning my confession and challenging my confidence.

"He waits because he knows that I am worth it; he waits because I bring completeness to him," I said in hope that this word would end such inquiry.

"So you complete him. Is he complete?"

"No. I meant complete more on scale of being better, not best. My part in his life makes him better," I said, exasperated by the questions.

"Better than ever," the voice said promptly.

"No, not necessarily. He has said, or suggested, that life and living is a new experience; maybe being better began when he arrived here. Maybe meeting me has made the experience even better, and maybe—with time and place—he will experience the best."

"You're quite confident in spite of your shaking," the voice said, exposing my insecurity once again.

"I have my moments," I admitted humbly.

"So, sometimes you're shaking, and other times you're not," the voice said with perhaps turning to the positive.

IN THE LESSENING

"Yes, I don't like shaking, but it comes over me—as though I was born with it," I explained.

"How long have been shaking?"

"As long as I can remember, or think that I can recall," I continued.

"Years perhaps," the voice asks, posing as some sort of physician.

"Yes, but I'm getting better; life and living helped and, more so, meeting him," I patiently added.

"So you don't struggle as much?"

"No, I don't these day. I do hate to shake, but it comes over me suddenly and without warning. It is a second me, a twin of sort, for which I despise. When I want the sun, it brings the rain—a dark cloud looming over me, over everthing that mattters to me. It is a darkness that blocks THE LIGHT and keeps THE WAY at bay," I told the voice.

"I know Abby. That which you describe is a darkness; and you have suffered," the voice added with apparent understanding, even sympathy.

"If you know, why the inquiry," I asks, feeling some level of resentment. "Why all the questions?"

"I just wanted to be sure that you knew—that you understood what was going on," the voice told me.

"I can now remember the losses; each and everyone one that mattered to me," I confessed.

"Yes, the passing of these persons was a great and terrible time," the voice said as though witnessing the experiences.

"And I was alone; lost in the losses, unable to love even myself," I continued to confess—assured that the voice would be accepting.

"It is hard to love or keep loving when everyone you loved is lost. Shaking is a natural response, darkness an unavoidable condition," the voice explained with clarity.

"But I am better now. We are better now. We together are better," I said, turning more to the positive of this time and place.

"And you are sure, aren't you," the voice said only to confirm my convictions.

"I am more sure than before now."

IN THE LESSENING

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IN THE LESSENING

IN THE REALM (of the ruling politic)

Master and slave of

You are a master of the words you don't say,
and a slave to the ones you do.

- Unknown

Traveling south-southeast, I moved toward the coastal region. Not longer than a few days into my travel, the signs of the coming storm were growing.

I wondered why I had made this decision to embark on what was increasingly becoming a misadventure; *what was the point in my traveling if I fail?*

But this is how life and living is, I thought. Many are the plans in the mind, desires in the heart, without the foreknowledge of what will, or even can, happen.

We do what we do without necessarily understanding whether we just want, or should, do it. The outcome or result—as we interpret it—is justification for what we did, whether out of want or something more.

I don't always do what I should, but even then, there is mercy in THE WAY. And "nothing can make injustice just but mercy."⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Robert Frost.

As it is, my "misadventure" has avoided contact with the likes of POLITIC. I am sure that MATI is about, but my journey seems to be of little import to the eyes; evidently, METRO has its mind on the storm and the going concern, continuous conflict abroad.

It a strange, POLITIC; it is presented as sacred though it is nothing of the sort. As Cal told me: "POLITIC is a imposter; professing to be perfect when, when in fact a source of systemic problems." *What was what he said*, "They make persons pay; pay dearly, under their universal writ, yet they purposely exempt themselves from the same.... *Hypocrites, they are*, I thought. *It is all a ruse; nothing new under the sun, but the powerful merely planning and pursuing their interests at the expense of the many. What criminals they all are; a cabal to be sure—of what Smith called "the vile maxim of the masters of mankind".*¹⁰⁰ Cal continued: "This paradox is not without planning, of course. 'Nothing in POLITIC happens by accident.' No, it is calculated, constructed to ensure their ever rising power and every increasing possession." *And as Cal continued, it became increasing clear: as they grow in power, societal strength declines.* "Don't be misled; their mission is without limit, their appetite for power and possession insatiable," Cal explained. "It is important that you understand...."

¹⁰⁰ Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*.

IN THE LESSENING

And so Cal introduced us to POLITIC, its nature. He urged us to not be misled in the endless entitlements—these are merely borrowing on your future. “Understand that you bare the burden for such giveaways.” Yes, *a ruse; it’s all a shell game, a state-originated and operated shell game.* “You may been thankful for their charity— beleiving it to be the mark of compassion, a good government. But this thinking is not correct; for in their nature is no time or place for compassion, but rather a self-serving character by any measure and in every degree.” *My error, so I thought.*



“Even as you came to such conclusions, if you did at all, silence is no different than stupidity; both lend to status quo—more of the same slavery to sordid plans and missions,” Cal cautioned. *I cannot continue to be stupid, silent; this is far to serious, I realized.* “Down be downhearted in your state, to suggest that silence and stupidity is not unnatural either: It is much more common to do nothing than to say something. You are not alone in such attitudes, even apathy, for under such power, individual persons are powerless.” *And this is why COMMUNITY is our hope; a collection of close relations is our strength, restored in THE LESSENING.*

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE REALM (of the ruling politic)

Because they will

Friends are helpful not only because they will listen to us, but because they will [do more].

- Will Durant; writer, historian

COMMUNITY is about friendship and family. Individuals will naturally gravitate toward each other, toward groups—not government, the state—real relationships that render the possibility for life and living.

COMMUNITY is a displaced people; uprooted and unconnected from the past, our patronage. We cannot restore our roots—or even replace them—but we have a hope to restore some of which was lost in the days leading-up to and including THE LESSENING.

“POLITIC is not a person; it has no soul or heart, no means of sensing or expressing compassion.” Cal told me. “It may present a persona—but this is all a charade aimed at convincing the many that it is as individual as they are, though an institution.”



It's all theater; a show that must go on and on. “And though their power be seemingly insurmountable, institutions cannot endure forever; they come and go, rise and fall, and in this cycle exchange one for another, give or take the name and a few other details.

IN THE LESSENING

Are we powerless? Even if we win the battle, the war belongs to them. Maybe a different sort but the same show—a rerun of the ruin that such institutions run.

“It seems pointless, doesn’t it, Cal continued. “Why try when all seems lost, you might think or say.” My thought exactly; what is the point if the conclusion has already been formed or framed? “It may seem pointless, I know; but taking any action, however small, has some potential,” Cal began to explain as though reading my thoughts, my doubts on resistance.

“Resistance is only the beginning of what can become a mass-movement—the spark that starts a fire.” But is that something that we should do, or want to do. Resistance could lead to a revolution, violence, and then.... “But is violence the effective means,” Cal asks. No; violence is not our way—not THE WAY—to do it. But what can we do short of a revolution?

Such seem like the road less traveled, the choice of a few over the many. Is it the possibility of action or the revelation of truth that strike at such power? “Why is the truth dangerous,” Cal asks, and with a moment, replied: “Truth can be dangerous, shedding light on the darkness of power—the curtain lifted, the ruse undone, the real actors exposed.”

What of those who resist? Are they undone in the ruin, in the ruse? “It is possible, unfortunately, that those who refused or resisted the ruse can end-up in the ruin. Nothing protects the innocent or intelligent from the ills; we are all caught-up in it in some way,” he explained with evident sorrow.

IN THE LESSENING

Cal continued: "I tell you these things not to frighten you, but because you are my friends. I love you and I care about you; not like they say they do—or even proceed to prove it by purchasing your patronage—but in the real meaning of such relationships; that is, to sacrifice my life for your sake—to give my last measure for folks that matter most."

"History tells us that resistance has worked in some degree." Cal said, reflecting on some of what he knew of life and living in this region before THE LESSENING. *But it depends on how much one of a relative few are willing to sacrifice and suffer*, I thought, reflecting on my own understanding.

"When the institutions of power began to exclude spirituality from the public forum, life and living began to falter and fail," Cal continued, referring to a period in the mid-1900's. "The powers had been elevated to echelons of empire—an outcome of a great war and the spoils that follow," he continued. *And so an empire, once more, to follow the cycle of history.*

"More costs, more consequences, followed this one—that extended power and possession to districts and degrees unprecedented," Cal began, "never before in the known world. The integration of institutions was instrumental in this expansion, combining both financial and military powers," he continued, "in the confiscation of resources." *And the costs—also proportional to the confiscation—as there had never been before or since, so history would eventually tell.*

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE REALM (of the ruling politic)

Things that are

Rejoice in the things that are present; all
else is beyond thee.

- Michel de Montaigne; essayist, author

"How is your care? Are you getting what you need,"
Sal asks.

"Yes, I am more than being taken care of, I can tell
you that," I replied.

"What can I do," Sal continued.

"What haven't you done Sal; you are a friend. Is
there anything more that you can do?"

"I don't know. I just feel so helpless; why, with our
relocation about to begin while you remain-."

"You knew it would come," I reminded him.

"Yes, as passing comes to all of us; but it doesn't
make it any easier. I'm just-."

"Yes, I get angry too. I cannot tell how angry I get
over my ailments; it's bad enough knowing the end is
near, but to add to it, the suffering-sometimes
beyond all sensation," I explained in my own words.

"I see it, I know; that too makes me angry Cal."

Looking directly at me, Sal asks a hard question: "Then you will be happy when you pass?"

"I don't know if I will be happy, but I will be content, I'm sure," I said confidently.

"But do you feel powerless," Sal asks, perhaps to understand what the last stages of life are like.

"No, I don't. I've got you, COMMUNITY. I have THE LIGHT and THE WAY—these things that have given life and living like no other. I feel very powerful, indeed."

"But not too powerful, right," Sal asks with subtle humor.

"Oh, I know where you're going with this; too powerful as in condemned to corruption, and that sort of thing," I said, still serious.

"Yes, the thing that you harp on; ah, I mean frequently warn us," Sal said, "of pride and such."

"You had it right, 'harp'," Cal remarked, bursting out in laughter with intermittent coughing. "But to answer your question, the power I speak of is not my own, I realize; but it is rather a resource given to us."



"You cannot abuse it," Sal began.

"Else, it becomes scarce—that's right Sal. As long as I realize the truth about power, I am kept in check; safeguarded from abusing it. It's only when I think differently that it becomes—."

"Like a drug," Sal interrupted.

"You are spot-on, once again."

"It helps to have a good teacher," Sal remarked, attempting to give me some credit.

"You mean the one that harps?"

"Yes, but not noise that drones on; but more like a mindful and mellow refrain," he clarified as a credit to me.

"But repetition does not make it right," I said, baiting Sal for more.

"Yes, I know—but's that not what I mean," he explained. "But I know where you're going with this, the repetition; that doing or saying the same thing over and over again somehow makes it right."

"Spot-on once more Sal. Congratulations, you win!"

"How is that possible when the world is in continuous conflict," Sal asks, shifting the subject somewhat from words to actions.

"Well, that's what POLITIC tells us; that winning is just a moment away," I remarked, referring to 'the noise that drones on'.

"Yeah, but if it wasn't them it would be someone else to fill the spot," Sal replied.

"Spot-on, on the 'spot'," I blurted-out. "I think I'm being silly, don't you think?"

“Oh, you’re definitely silly—but in a powerful way,” Sal said in the lightheartedness of the moment.

Yes, there is plenty of POLITIC to fill our heads with images and illusions. It is all part of the show, the theater. And in an age of information, the show or theater was vastly more effective. Research and pioneering in the mass-media gave way to propaganda—the voice of POLITIC—and what had been limited by modes like our own was now multiplied many times over through international connectivity-communications. *How the media was able to move, manipulate, and mine the minds of mankind.*

And with the media, POLITIC was even more empowered; *for what better way to control than through the individual mind?* Yes, POLITIC presented the individual with promotions of individual rights—an idea that could not be ignored. Following in its nature—to consolidate power and combine possession—the likes of POLITIC used such ideas to fool the many on behalf of the few. *Increasingly, the many became less significant, even worthy for life and living.*

POLITIC was the means to consolidate military, merchantilism and ministry—to exhaust or enviscerate all energy of resistance and revolution—and to centralize control to even fewer of the few, giving rise to more of the immortality that had plagued mankind from the days of Babylon. *The worship of the created has been our downfall more than once—and yet, from generation to generation, such lessons are soon forgotten, apt to be tested once again.*

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE REALM (of the ruling politic)

Whose time has

An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not
an idea whose time has come.

- Victor Hugo; poet, novelist, playwright

“Mat, the last of the provisions are in route.”

“Good, let me know of the team’s return.” We were making progress; the plan to relocate to higher ground. Together, we would make our ascent perhaps to the highest point in the region, the safest and surest place to survive the storm.

While preparing, I had come across some notes from Cal; some of his ideas and commentary on the numerous topics of recent history. Events on the eve of THE LESSING were dated and detailed: the nuclear attack that sacked some areas, defensive installations; the immediate and subsequent disease and death, part of which was due to nuclear fallout; the disintegration of law and order; and so on. ¹⁰¹

Cal had learned from Simon, “the real story”. State media first reported that the attack was terrorism: an act of some organization based in the Far East, described as religious zealots who had-it-out for the West. Such reports became increasingly sketchy as conflicting information leaked-out.

¹⁰¹ More details are in the last chapter, “In the know”.

IN THE LESSENING

If the general public was not already disturbed enough by the attack, the inaccurate reporting only piled it on. It was messy situation in many ways—and those with the power and position to manage the chaos gave-in or gave-out. *The real question in my mind would not be why they failed—but why they wanted to.*

History suggested that fears of an such an invasion had occupied the public since the 1940's, or since nuclear warfare had been in use. The entire landmass actually trained for such manmade disasters; first, countermeasures of the military; and second, general safety and security and of the public. *An event occurred in the 1950's and, whether staged or not, reinforced such fears.*

The nuclear attack was not the only event, it's aftermath not the only cause for general decline; other events and phases occurred in no particular order, yet compounding in the overall effect of what would be THE LESSENING.

One of the more significant phases was an ever-growing war of economics, something of a program or model called Neo-Liberalism. Touted as another enhancement to individualism, this model or programs invariably undermined the sovereignty and solvency of nation-states on an international scale. Neo-Liberalism upstaged and undid much of national commerce; it was extortion and espionage—virtually eliminating any orientation toward, or benefit to, the common good, community.

They were just legalized mobsters or thugs that run the streets—forcing citizens and communities to do

things against their will, paying protection money to possible save their own lives and businesses.

It was a racket—just like conventional conflicts or wars. Sometimes called crony-capitalism, the meaning of revolution ensured that the richer got richer—while everyone else suffers. *Any chance of an egalitarian society was over—if it ever existed.*



This was only a few pages of Cal's stuff; so much more here that he had shared, later supported with Simon's insights. Of course there were other contributors, but I mentioned these two because they are remembered and respected by us.

Not everybody suffered...as is always true in time of war or crisis. At the beginning of METRO, the most powerful and affluent went subterranean in, evidently, pre-constructed cities. They had been prepared for such a nuclear attack or invasion for some time; at least long enough to ensure their survival. And as they made their way underground, things up top were becoming increasingly chaotic. The combination of events and phases had produced irrevocable conditions; much of the society was under siege by one severity or another. The population was fractionalized; completely susceptible to invasion or overthrow—although neither ever came.

Why did it happen? But the real question was not why it happened, but rather, why it had to happen—along the lines of those with power and position, who allowed failure in the first place.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE REALM (of the ruling politic)

A difference in

Each day when I awake I know I have one more day to make a difference in someone's life.

- James Mann; author

“Any news from the team.”

“Nothing yet, Arc. They were last reported in route,” Mat responded. “What are you doing?”

“Nothing at the moment. I have been busy with my usual routine and some studying,” I told him.

“Oh, you’ve cracked some books,” Mat replied, looking surprised.

“No, I don’t think I’ve cracked them,” I said, unsure of what he meant by the question.

“I did not mean to actually crack or break, but to separate to open and read. It’s a figure of speech that is dated,” Mat explained.

“Oh, I get it; a figure of speech.”

“That’s right Arc, just an expression most likely drawn from my distant past; some folks who passed it down, I guess,” Mat continued to explain.

IN THE LESSENING

"I been reading about the past; things that I knew nothing about. I didn't know of resources like this—nothing about it," I said sincerely.

"That doesn't surprise me; generally it is the position of most—especially those coming from METRO," Mat reminded me.

"The stuff I'm reading doesn't seem to have any relevance. METRO is mentioned, but the description is very different—as though a another time and place," I continued.

"Again, I am not surprised. What you are reading is real, accurate and factual—though, to your point, not congruent with what you know of METRO," Mat continued.

"I see. So they lie, is that it," I asks, though knowing it to be so.

"Yes, in a way, but it's more a deliberate misleading, misinforming." Mat clarified. "For example, the way that you were misinformed about your orders, your duty and so forth."

"Yeah, they lie; but then, so do I," I confessed, though realizing that such was already known.

"That is a problem Arc; once such begins, it becomes a practice—one lie leads to another and—."

"Lies upon lies," I said with a sigh.

"Exactly. It's contagious and, like a disease, it destroys," Mat added, emphasizing the outcome.

"So it becomes of way of life," I said, knowing that sort of way, the life.

"You might believe that, but on a personal level, the problem with telling lies is that have to continue to remember what you said. Sooner or later you forget and, in turn, others stop trusting you. They despise you—even if they lie too. The whole affair divides and destroys persons and their places," Mat explained as though living it too.

"My lies led to rejection, then," I asks—though knowing this now as a fact.

"Yes, your lies and perhaps other destructive behavior bred resentment among the rouges," he confirmed.

"And they were innocent," I promptly responded, showing my on resentment.

"We know what rouges can do—what they have done. But the point is that your lies were your choice. You chose to lie and, in turn, created the rejection."

"So it's all my fault," I asked defensively.

"Not exactly Arc. You were trained this way. METRO is corrupt; thus your behavior is merely a reflection of METRO," Mat explained, linking our ways.

"Well it works for them. I mean, look at—."

"Yes, I can't deny their momentary gains. But the truth is that their ways have adverse consequences," Mat said with the confidence of his own study.

"And then," I asks, seeking more.

"And then there will be strife; internal conflict that undermines their order and brings them down."

"I think I read about that; they collaspe from within—is that what you mean," I asks.

"History offers solid truth to this outcome. There are a mulitude of reasons for collaspe, but a common thread is misinformation and misdirection," he continued with an example or two.

"Deceipt. I know about that," I replied, more or less concluding what I had already admitted.

"Yes, you are sneeky; but again, this is what you were trained to do," Mat said, looking me in the eye.



"So how do I get untrained; how do stop telling lies?"

"It helps to understand the certain end that I describe," Mat continued, and to understand what matters.

"I'm not sure anything matters to me."

"What is it you fear most," Mat asks.

IN THE LESSENING

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IN THE FACE (of a troubled planet)

We can never

We can never get a re-creation of community and heal our society without giving our citizens a sense of belonging.

- Hunter Campbell "Patch" Adams (born 1945);
physician, activist, author

"What I fear the most? I don't know; maybe death," Arc said with some thoughtfulness.

"That's not unusual, to fear death, but I don't agree with you," I said, "because I think your greatest fear is rejection or abandonment."

"Rejection. So I fear the thing that I earned, so to speak. I caused that which I fear the most," Arc asks with some obvious confusion.

"This is what I believe," I added. You like to please—you live to please—but your real desire was to please yourself. You lied and did other things, possibly everything, to please yourself. Is it any wonder that you were rejected?"

"No, not really, since it's clarified. So I am my own worst enemy," he asks in another way.

"Yes, and that's a terrible place to be; for the person has much difficulty dealing with it—understanding that they cause at least some of their problems, their hardships."

"I get it; it's like in my reading, of empire; of how an empire destroys itself," Arc said.

"Yes, an empire expands until over-extended, then exhausted leading to its end."

"When do they learn," Arc asks.

"Not soon enough, I'm afraid. But even if they learn, they still go on, as history explains, doing the same thing over and over again," I continued.

"A cycle," Arc added.

"Yes, a cycle that never ends, it seems."

"You would think-."

"That's the problem; they don't," I interrupted.

"It seems like madness, insanity and the sort," Arc added.

"It's power; that is the problem," I said.

"So power is the problem?"

"Power can be like a drug; some can take it and walk away while others want more and more. Power overtakes them, and it is intoxicating, driving them to do even the unthinkable," I explained.

"Was that what happened to me; did I overdose on power," Arc asked, probably already aware.

"Yes, that is what happened," I answered.

"And I thought it was just consorting with the wrong crowd," Arc said, considering the influences.

"No, not really. What happened could have happened in the best crowd. No, your biggest problem was you; a boy enticed into a life of entertainment and espionage," I continued.

"What a fool-."



"Yes, it was foolish; but we've all done it—none of us are free from foolishness," I admitted.

"And the consequences are-."

"The consequences are difficult to comprehend. Our individual journeys are not entirely our own doing; but rather, is the result of other factors, sometimes mysterious or altogether unknown." If our consequences could be completely understood as cause & effect, we might be better at correcting our ways, making better choices. As it is, the consequences are sometimes, what was that word, 'systemic', I think."

"Difficult to dissect as to the causes," Arc asks.

"So does that mean that, even if we learn and stop doing foolish things, similar cosequences could result?"

"Well, yes; that is possible."

"Then why bother changing; why stop with foolish choices if the consequences don't change?"

“There is chance in your choices. So if you choose to not continue—or try not to be foolish—than the possibility exist for improvement—for life and living as we seek,” I tried to explain realizing the difficulty.

“But there is no certainty,” Arc continued.

“No absolutes, yes. But you don’t change with the certainty that consequences will improve; but rather, for other reasons,” I continued to explain, carefully choosing my words.

“And what could these be?”

“COMMUNITY for one,” I promptly replied.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE FACE (of a troubled planet)

A man who has

Only a man who has felt ultimate despair is
capable of feeling ultimate bliss.

- Alexander Dumas

“So we turn for others too, is that it?”

“That’s it, Arc.”

“Sounds easy enough,” I said, though not really giving the possibility much thought.

“You might think so, but in practice it can be a real challenge—hard work,” Mat muttered.

“Did you say ‘hard work’?”

“Yes, it can be very hard even if we believe it the best. Arc, we don’t always do what we think is best; so even if we’ve really given it some thought—and think we’ve decided—we may end up doing the opposite, or worse,” Mat continued.

“So you’re saying it’s impossible,” I asks, still confused and unsure.

“No, not impossible, just difficult. You see, we have our own history of helps and hurts, of pleasure and pain and so on. This history has great influence on what we do—even what we think. We are not fully aware of just how much influence our history has.”

"So I did what I did because-."

"Of what you learned, but also what worked too." With a moment of silence, Mat said, "You look uncertain, so let me give you another example; someone we both know," he began. "Simon for whom you know some of his history; what he believed--the consequences and challenges."

"Simon was good," I mentioned recounting the richness of his words, the depth of his character and courage.

"I don't know if he was altogether good, but he was a real overcomer, a person who had been dealt much pain and punishment and yet, from it all, found forgiveness. But why forgive when he could have stayed angry, bitter and spiteful? Did he choose to forgive or-?"

"Mat, I'm not sure why. I don't how-."

"Neither do I; not really. I only know that his greatness came through his weakness."

"Greatness from weakness? I don't understand," I said, unable to link the two.

"Simon had to come to terms with his history; he had to try to understand what happened--without necessarily understanding why. It takes courage to do this; to face the past with clarity and conscious. He did...and it made all the difference for him--and for us too."

"But weakness," I said, still not clear myself.

"Anytime we do this sort of thing, we are bound to uncover our weakness; to realize that we are not who we thought we were—or whom we wanted to be. It is in our discovery of weakness that we learn the truth and, in turn, come to such greatness," Mat explained.

"So am I weak too, is that it?"

"Yes, you are weak—though you evidently don't know it, since you had to ask," Mat continued.

"Good, then I am great too."



"Not so easy my friend. The journey to greatness is packed with pain and punishment," Mat cautioned. "Just look at what Simon had to endure."

"And you think I haven't endured—."

"No, I don't. Sure, you have had some dissappointments and, undoubtably, have witnessed death—possibly a threat on your own—but your journey has only begun. You have a lot more trouble to face, believe me," Mat

"Yes, trouble," I murmured, wondering if he realized just how much trouble I had been in—or caused.

"Trouble as you have never imagined," Mat said, staring directly at me.

"I was hoping this so-called 'life and living' would be an improvement," I said, less hopeful.

"I am hoping as well, but you are going to have more than disappointments; there will be times of despair—hopelessness and hunger. You will prefer death even," Mat explained as though foreseeing my future.

"Wow, I have a lot to look forward to, don't I," I quipped.

"Whether you think so or not, the facts remain: life and living will not exempt you from pain and punishment and may even add to it," Mat said sincerely.

"So you like pain and punishment, I take it, since you're here," I asks bluntly.

"No, I don't; that would be unnatural. We are not masters of our destiny ordetermine our journey. I am here because I need COMMUNITY," Mat replied.

"And as for me; what do I need?"

"Arc, that is something that will have to conclude as well; why you are here and why you decide to stay, if you do."

"Maybe its you, Mat; maybe you are the reason that I am here, in this time and place. Maybe you need me."

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE FACE (of a troubled planet)

The first step to

What is defeat? [Defeat is] nothing but education, nothing but the first step to something better.

- Wendell Phillips; slavery abolitionist

I can remember him saying, “Ben, you may be small in size, but you have a big brain.” *I guess that’s alright; if you’ve got to be big, why not the brain?* Cal had a way about him; encouraging and educated, he was at the center of COMMUNITY. Like Simon, he had known the alternative—he had seen the state at its worst and new the danger that awaits those who allow such power to grow and possess.... He would say: “When state grows to such bounds, you are not doomed to fail—just doomed!”

State cannot be friend or family; it can be a guardian or a master, but it cannot function on such individual terms when it is an institution. Furthermore, state is not moral, but amoral; it is not capable of a conscience or have excuses—since it needs no solice in its wrongdoing, even wickedness. POLITIC, purported as justice, is a tyranny.

There is no greater tyranny than that which is perpetrated under the shield of law and in the name of justice.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Political philosopher Montesquieu (1689 - 1755).

IN THE LESSENING

An academic discovered and documented:

Every assumption of state, whether by gift or seizure, leaves society with so much less power; there is never, nor can be, any strengthening of state power without a corresponding and roughly equivalent depletion of social power.¹⁰³

State is a thief, a thug; it steals from society, it fleeces the family, preys on parents, felonizes fathers. State is a maurader that sought out marriage and then took it down step by step. Cal writes about this condition: "The decline in society was marked by a decrease and devaluation of marriage. As divorce was made easier, more convenient, it became more common—even widespread—leading to the decline of marriage and societal strength. The defeat of marriage meant was the death knewll for social strength: as marriage goes, so goes fathers; as fathers go, so goes parenting; as parenting goes, so goes family; and as family goes, so goes society.

POLITIC became increasingly complicated, perhaps intentionally, to the extent that the vast majority of citizens could not comply, let alone comprehend, the endless volumes. This problem essentially implicated everyone which only compounded the danger that:

Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedy.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Albert Nock, *Our Enemy the State*.

¹⁰⁴ Ernest Benn.

Cal writes: "The prison system grew at phenomenal rates; not necessarily because of rising crime rates but more the result of changes in POLITIC that created longer sentences and more convenient, if not certain, conviction for the charged. Defendants' so-called rights were simply ignored, giving rise to the recurring problems of lawlessness by the law." *But the worst of times got worse.*



Adding to state power was the progressive partnership of POLITIC and merchantilism followed by a shifting of possession. The warnings were few, however clear the consequences:

Corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of this country will endeavour to prolong its reign by working on the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed. ¹⁰⁵

But apparently they didn't listen;; perhaps because they would profit from such power, partnership. In the end, who needs POLITIC when everyone owes you or is indebted to you. "Give me control of a nation's money and I care not who makes her laws." ¹⁰⁶

Then came the marriage to end all marriages: merchantilism and the ministry of man. One source of spirituality—under one authority of man—that finished the outfitting of the order.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. President Abraham Lincoln.

¹⁰⁶ Mayer Amschel Rothschild.

IN THE LESSENING

Scribbled in the margins of Cal notes:

Whereever an institution has been given full sway,
it has devoured individuals at an incredible rate.
I think this is going to be the paradigm for the
21st Century. ¹⁰⁷

And so it does, as it did.

¹⁰⁷ David Simon, "The Wire".

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE FACE (of a troubled planet)

Call it a

Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.

- Jane Howard

“And the perfect classroom, don’t you think, Sal?”

“Yes, it is a strength,” I agreed

Cal has used the runners to distribute his copious notes, his collection of history. Those who received copies learned the contents, distributed and instructed too. So in time, Cal had more or less established a school, a family of learners. He used to say: “I am not a teacher, but an awakener.”¹⁰⁸

And awaken he did; he brought life and living in a way that only learning can do.

“The family is an invaluable part of society,” he told me. “Do you remember family; a father, mother or other?”

“No, not really; some pictures to go by, a few collectables, but nothing else,” I explained.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Frost.

"That seems to be most of our stories, but the family is important—vital to the health of civilization."

"Even the state," I ask, risking the chance of some deep-felt diatribe.

"Especially the state, however history defies such certainty," he emphatically replied. "The state can only survive in the presense of a healthy society; without it, life is short—decline and death certain."

"Why does history describe deviations; the state rising while society suffers," I continued.

"I think you know, Sal."

"Corruption grows with power, right?"

"Yes, corruption surfaces and, before you know it, state is drowning in its own decline and eventual destruction," Cal agreed.

"Sounds like the scuttling of a ship to me."

"Yes, it's almost that deliberate, absent the good intentions," he continued.

"So you mean that state deliberately destroys itself," I asks, "as though a disturbed, deranged captain intent on sinking the vessel?"

“Deranged is probably a good description. You know what corruption does; it confuses and convolutes to the point of certain, catastrophic consequences.”

“But then—,” I started to say.

“Such outcomes cannot be avoided—even with the best of intentions—but even so, take responsibility for wrongdoing, error in action or plans.

We shall act with good intentions, but at times we will be wrong. When we are, let us admit it and try to right the situation. ¹⁰⁹

“Does that mean ‘righting the ship’,” I asks, continuing in the vein of shipping.

“Yes, it could, if the Captain has his wits about him,” Cal replied.

“What if he doesn’t; or worse, what if the Captain has taken ill and is incapacitated, indisposed?”



“That’s when family counts; a good crew that can take the helm and put her back on course,” he continued.

“I see; so everyone needs to be a leader?”

“I think so, in some degree; each and all must be ready to serve and, in such circumstances to lead when the situation calls,” Cal explained.

¹⁰⁹ Joe Paterno.

IN THE LESSENING

"And if there's a dispute, a struggle over who is going to lead...and follow," I said, continuing to probe.

"Well, that is where communication and collaboration come in," Cal said spontaneously.

"Oh please, not that jargon."

"Just testing you, Sal; anyway, it's about family, love and understanding."

"How do get love on board a ship?"

"I don't know. I suppose you could start by naming the ship, 'The Love Boat'."

"Cal, are you sure about that," I ask, realizing that our conversation was taking a comical tone.

"Yes, that would be good. Paint some love language on it, maybe string some beads fore to aft, throw in some color for the right effect. I can see it."

"Far-out man, that boat would rock!"

"Better that 'it rock' than foundering on the-."

"Rocks; yeah, it's a rock'en righteous frigate of family, that love boat."

"I'd definitely board-with you at the helm, of course."

IN THE DREAMS (of a dreadful day)

When we serve

When we serve we experience, when we experience we teach, when we teach we learn, when we learn our lives are permanently changed, and as our lives are changed we are enriched beyond our wildest dreams.

- Jaren L. Davis

We need you, Arc,” Mat responded, “as you need us.”

“For what? My occupation has no place here.”

“You do have a point there, but nothing stops you from learning; developing new skills in service to this time and place,” he continued.

“You mean I’ve got to serve somebody?”

“Sure, you’ve got to serve somebody, but that’s nothing new for you, Arc.”

“Yeah, but now I have to think about somebody else, their needs,” I said, realizing some of the sacrifice.

“Yes, above your wants; you’ve got to serve somebody—it’s THE WAY,” he explained.

Mat was right; you do have to serve. I had been serving ‘somebody’ all my life.

IN THE LESSENING

"Do you ever dream," I asks him, changing the subject.

"Oh yes, I have dreams," Matt replied.

"And what do you dream about?"

"I dream about the past, what I perceive; and sometimes, I dream about the future."

"How do you know you're dreaming about the future, since it hasn't happen," I continued.

"Good question," Mat remarked. "My dreams of the future are sometimes revelation; the dream is providing advanced understanding of somethng to happen. In some recollections, my dreams could be matched to actual events."

"No way. How do you know it's not wishful thinking?"

"Oh, I know, and others too."

"You mean others dream too?"

"Yes, my revelations are not the only; indeed, several of us have matched our dreams—even to the future—as impossible at that might seem," Mat explained.

"So you have matching dreams of the future. That is far-out man, far-out," I commented, though still uncertain.



"Not always; sometimes the revelation is realized over a matter of days, even hours," he quipped.

"It was a figure of speech, Mat."

"I know what you meant—I get it. But as such sight, of the future, you may just as well experience the same," he suggested, "and then you will have no doubts."

"How about dreaming that I will have dreams," I said, still trying to lighten the conversation.

"Very funny Arc, but seriously, you cannot decide on dreams or dreaming. Dreams are not willed by the dreamer."

"So you can't dream on demand?"

"No, I don't control my dreams—not even the interpretations. And I don't control other's dreams," he continued.

"This seems exciting; seeing into the future," I commented with noted curiosity.

"It is exciting, but sometimes, frightening," Mat motioned with his hand. "But just as exciting is dreaming of the past; especially of history that is not necessarily found in Cal's notes or comments. Cal has actually used such dreams as references to his own record."

"History has a way of doing that; forcing you to fall into a dream, or at least slumber, and come out the better, the wiser."

"Boring is it," I quipped.

"Oh yes, the subject does have a reputation, for sure," Mat agreed. "But that can change, just as the opinion or understanding of dreams, dreaming," he said, connecting the two. "You should try reading the works of Howard Zinn."

"Who's Howard Zinn," I asks.

"He's a professor, or was; he was an activist too, beginning both not too far from here."

"That's righteous man, righteous," I replied, turning to my play again.

"Yes, righteous," Mat repeated, evident of my play. "So tell me Arc, where do you get these terms?"

"You mean 'far-out' and such?"

"Yes, all of it," he replied.

"History; it's a blast from the past."

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DREAMS (of a dreadful day)

Which escape those

Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night."

- Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849); poet, author

Startled from sleep, I was on my feet before I really was aware of where I was. "Wow, what a dream," I said to myself even before realizing my surroundings.

The surroundings, a pasture, were peaceful; no sign of anyone else that may have seen me wake. *It's bad enough as it is; let them see me now and the worst would be yet to come.*

Pulling myself together, I began the track back to the village. *Lots of things I must do; can't spend the day dwelling on the dream—as much as I would like to. I've got responsibilities; preparations still for the relocation.*



"Hey Ben," said two children playing as I passed them. "Did you have a good nap?"

How did they know I was sleeping, I wondered as I only then realized the grass on me.

"Yes, it was fine, and what about yours...?"

IN THE LESSENING

"We don't have to take naps anymore on account that we're older. And you, are you older? Would you like to play?"

What does a person have to do to get respect around here?

"Why, hey there Ben o' boy," came a familiar voice.

"How are you doing," I asked.

"I am okay, though I had a strange dream," they began.

You too; it must be contagious, I thought. But then, most of us dream—even the children—so why should I be surprised.

"Good day Ben. You're looking rested," came comments from another.

What is it. Can't a person take a nap, I thought as I stepped into my shanty. "Time to do something constructive," I told myself as I continued on what would be an altogether good day leaving room to teach those children a thing or two. "Do you know why we dream," I asked them.

"Ben, but we've got some late afternoon chores," one said for the group.

"Chores? Well if you must," I said, feeling some slight pain of rejection. *That will be the last time I go out of my way for such a thankless bunch, was my immediate thought. I loathe rejection.*

"Ben o' boy, don't be discouraged; they do like you," came that familiar voice again.

"Yes, I'm sure they do since I brought them apples."

"No silly, I mean they really like you. They talk about you all the time. They say, 'Ben is so smart.'"

"They do?"

"Yes, they think of you as a scholar, some sort of sensai."

"A sensai, me?" *It did make sense—from the mouth of babes: 'Ben, sensai—teacher of all things wide and wonderful, dreamer of things past and future, the rendering of a Renaissance man.*

"But they also tell me that you cheat at checkers."

I don't cheat—not usually. "They do, do they? Well, I'll be on my way," I said, looking for an exit.

"Don't you mean, THE WAY," came a child's voice behind me.

I thought they had chores. "I've really got to go." *So get out of my way,* I thought as my feet made haste for the pasture; the time and place of my earlier dream for which I now am beginning to remember. *A missive surge, the ocean swelled; it was powerful and pervasive, covering what had long been dry land. In this time and place, every feature that existed before the surge was gone; absorbed into in the wake of the storm, covered now by seawater.*

IN THE LESSENING

My present state was restored to the present conscious. As earlier that day, I took a moment to regain myself, body and mind. *Wow, I've got to share this*, as I began my return with urgency.

"Hey Ben o' boy, where are going this time," a familiar voice shouted as I reached the village.

"To the sea," I shouted back.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DREAMS (of a dreadful day)

And children whose

And children whose backgrounds have stunted
their sense of the future need to be taught by
example that they are good for more than they
dared dream."

- Kenneth Keniston; professor

"Ben o' boy," came that recurring address.

"Abby, I wish you would stop addressing me that way.
The children have picked-up on it; it is belittling."

"What wrong o' boy, having a hard time with
humility," she said knowing, pouring on more.

"I like you better before your betrothal; at least
then, I could get under your skin. As it is-."

"As it is, I'm on a slow boat to the Far East," she
said, seemingly more self-assured that I could
remember.

"Definitely a love boat," I replied, "but if you want
my advice, change your route. You don't want to go to
the Fareast unless your boat is outfitted for war."

"Are you saying that I should make love, not war,"
she asks, trying to embarrass me I suppose.

"No, I'm saying that the Fareast is at war."

"It's just a phrase I picked-up from Arc; he's full of them, you now," she explained.

"He's full of it, alright."

"Do I detect some jealousy. Are you bothered by Arc's handsome face, his Hip sytle, and popular lingo?"

"Jealous of him? How could I be; he's all image-no imagination to speak of, I began. "So he's got some odd words or 'lingo' as you call it. So what?"

"The children think he's cool. They say he's cooler than you, Ben."

"That's only because they can beat him at checkers. Why child wouldn't think he's cool? He's a child in some ways," I told her.



"So I hear you've been dreaming again. Is this true," Abby asks, turing on more serious matters.

"Yes, my mind has been at work—just as always—traveling through uncharted time and space. Nothing out-of-the-ordinary; the usual elevated thought, the mind at work on things that are beyond cool."

"I always tell everyone: 'Ben is a smart man. And if you don't believe me, just ask him,' Abby said, evidently to mock my self-confidence.

"Very funny Abby, but I am the hallmark of humility," I told her. "Not an ounce of pride or vanity in this heart of mine," I continued in my defense.

"You're the man, Ben o' boy," she continued in her teasing.

"Of course I am," I said in a lowered, firm tone. "Well I know it."

For a moment, we each were silent; no doubt, she was thinking of her next stab.

"What were you doing earlier, with the children," Abby asks.

"The usual; captivating them with my mental content."

"That's not what they told me," she replied.

"What do they know anyway? They are jealous, I suppose, just like you."

"That's such strong words. I prefer the word, 'tease', as in combing hair," she said, evidently aware that I had combed their hair.

"Are right, I've heard just about enough." *That's the last time I brush anyone's hair.* But all teasing aside, Abby was just trying to lighten the air. Things had been heavy; the air was thick, a real tangle of thoughts, like that child's hair that I reluctantly tried to comb out. "Hey Arc, what's happening? I mean, what are you doing," I said as Arc approached us.

"That's cool Ben, I can dig it," Arc said as he slapped his hand to mine. "I've been hangen-out, learning checkers, eating apples. What about you dude, still tripp-en on your dream-en?"

IN THE LESSENING

What's with the hand slapping, Even the children are doing it. They say, "Ben, 'give me five'."

"Five of what," I had to ask, not knowing what they were talking about, at first. *It seems to be rave, this 'five' clap.*

"Like this", as they illustrated, slapping the hands one to the other. So I give them 'five' and they said in unison, "You're beautiful baby."

First 'boy', now 'baby'. "Yes Arc, I am still dreaming."

"It ain't those awesome, negative waves, is it?"

"Big waves, not negative ones," I told him, still uncertain of what he meant.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DREAMS (of a dreadful day)

A melting pot of

We have become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic: different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, [and] different dreams.

- Jimmy Carter; 39th President of the United States

Other members of COMMUNITY has been rolling in throughout the day; this gathering was all part of the relocation plan. I was glad to meet others, some of which immediately distinguished themselves by their color, their facial features. I had never seen such skin tones and hair texture—not that I would have given much attention to it in my state, but in my distant recollection, such details were fuzzy—maybe, *far-out*.

It is amusing, this lingo, language. The children love it. They say it is righteous. Ben “begs to differ”; but then, he is “The Establishment”, says Arc. Anyway, Hip is, well, hip; but even with such amusements and entertainment, we are pressed to complete the plan. *The signs are more evident each day. Sal worries that we should have set-out already.* “How could we,” I said. “Why, with the provisions and the others, there would not have been enough time. I think the plan is on track.”



But Sal needs to try to relax, to *mellow-out*.

"You're right Bart. I just feel—"

"Responsible, I know, but's there only so much we can do, right? It's just like the hostages; you formed a plan, finalized the approach near the holding area, and left the rest—the risks—to what you taught me as THE WAY. Some things cannot be planned, certain or sure."

"Thanks Bart, I needed that," he said firmly as though slapped in the face. "You are learning—it shows—and so able to pass it on."

"Thanks, but I'm not yet a guru," I responded.

"Let me guess; 'guru' is another of the Arc terms," Sal asks, most likely knowing already.

"You're right. A guru is a great teaching, so says Arc."

Sal listened, saying with a smirk: "Very well, we will *split* tomorrow."

"Split," I asks. "Do you mean, depart?"

"Yes, we depart, but as to the other details; make sure everyone is accounted for. We don't want to leave anyone hang-en, get my drift," Sal continued still with a smirk.

"Cool," I responded. "I'm with you, bro."

IN THE LESSENING

Leaving Sal's shanty, I felt eight miles high.
Nothing like a solid skull session to clear the air.
That was righteous, real righteous.

COMMUNITY was a happen-en place. Having prepared for the relocation, we were gathering round the campfire, passing the peace pipe, relaxing with song.

"Hey Bart, join us," Ben shouted from some distance.

"Maybe later, I've got things I've got to—"

"Come on man, it's our last night," he persisted, seemingly unaware that I knew we were leaving tomorrow.

I guess I have no choice, I thought, unable to get passed his persistence. "I guess I can take a few to cool," I said, as I found a place.

"Groovy man," Ben shouted, speaking and behaving in a silly way. "What's up with Ben," I whispered to Abby.

"I'll fill you in later," she responded.

"You mean you'll give me the low-down?"

"Yes, that too baby," she said.

"Here, have an apple," Ben said. "They're juicy as all-get-out."

"Thanks," I said, stretching-out my hand. "Who are you folks," I asks as I glanced around the fire noticing the new faces.

IN THE LESSENING

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IN THE LEAST (of a mostly few)

Knows he has

A man knows he has found his vocation when he stops thinking about how to live, and begins to live.

- Thomas Merton; theologian, author

"I didn't know Ben sang," I remarked, hearing him at the fireside.

"Nor did he," Abby answered while laughing. "And he's not that bad for a beginner?"

And all of us sang, everywhere and in between; it was an experience like none I had ever had—a closeness with folks, some of which I had only recently met, if met at all. *If COMMUNITY had not come home to me, this had to be the moment*, I thought as the evening celebration came to a solemn but sentimental close.

Those selected as scouts, like myself and Abby, would follow the web formation; encircling the main group, rotating and shifting to relay information during our travels. Children and the aged would stay in the center; assistance during the walk provided by as needed. Each carried water and some daily provision of food while reserves would be pulled on small wagons or carts. Narrow passages in some places of the route meant that the line would be strung-out; no more than a pair side-by-side but otherwise, the center would stay close to each other.

IN THE LESSENING

I and the other scouts had been instructed on our role; what to look for and how to respond in the case of any perceived or apparent danger. We were told that progress could be hampered by foul weather; that, along with the composition of our team, would add time to the eighty kilometers or more to reach the our prepared destination.

Seeing Cal for the last time, I thanked him for all he had done. He told me how delighted he was in my decision to stay and to wed Abby. It was a special but saddened moment, losing a friend and teacher. He had made a profound difference in my life and living.

"Are you ready Bart," Abby asks. I felt a real sense of purpose and place—as though I had been born for this time. "Yes Abby," I said as we joined the group.

Names were called and last minute checks made in preparation. We fanned out as group moved beyond the village lines, taking our postions on the perimeter.

At the end of the first day, are progress brought us to a cavern; and there, we would make camp and prepare a meal.

"What is this place," I ask Abby.

"Don't know much about it, so let's ask the one who knows everything," she suggested, referring to Ben.

Ben was more than willing to tell us that the caverns had a history dating back to native, indiginous tribes. "These caverns were for ceremonial burials," he said.

"Why here, this cavern," I asked.

"This area bordering the Coosa, and continuing northwest, was populated by these peoples, their tribes."

"Sounds like COMMUNITY," I said.

"Yes, they were organized, integrated like us."

"What happened. Where did they go," I continued.



"They were largely overtaken by a superior people; those with larger numbers and superior weapons."

"METRO," I asked.

"Not exactly, but possibly ancestors—having similar physical features."

"More conflict, I suppose."

"No doubt that the native peoples were decimated in the conflict," Ben confirmed. "History marks conflict that occurred in this area; one being Horseshoe Bend."

Ben continued without pause. "Traces of these peoples are replete; names, to include 'Coosa' have been documented; and other names such as 'Tallapoosa', 'Talladega' and 'Tuskegee'."

"Yes, these names and the peoples were similar."

"Cal knows much more."

IN THE LESSENING

Histroy does have its way of warning, I thought. “We really must get back. We have a gathering to go over the day’s progress and tomorrow’s objectives.”

“These native peoples had similar gatherings and, like us, had to contend with continuing...,” Ben went on, as I made my distance.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LEAST (of a mostly few)

How hard you can

It ain't about how hard you can hit. It's about how hard you can get hit, and how much you can take, and keep moving forward.

- Rocky Balboa; quote from the Rocky Balboa movie

"All is good except the weather," Mat remarked.

"That's alright. Life's not all sunshine and rainbows—am I right?"

"More than right, Sal; you are righteous."

"Please don't start with Arc's artful words this morning. That lingo is too far out for me."

"Touchy are we," I said, as though there wasn't reason to be so.

"Yes, I am," Mat replied.

"That makes two of us. I guess like minds get moody alike," I said, sympathizing in some sort of way.

"You think they'll do alright; what I mean is, do you think they've got what it takes," he asks earnestly.

"I think we have a good chance—even with the inclimate conditions and terrain," I remarked.

"Did you see Cal," he asks, changing the subject.

IN THE LESSENING

"Yes, we talked. It was good to see him again," Mat remarked with a grin on his face. "He's as sharp as ever," I said, thinking of him even now.

"Alright, let's move," Mat said after a moment.

Beyond the first day's travel, things begin to happen; the weather began its turn—as we expected—along with other obstacles; and though tested and tried, we faced what was developing into daunting, dangerous and destructive event. *Perhaps some fear is a good thing*, I thought more than once.

On the third, Bart reported something unusual. "I saw a girl, maybe a woman, tied-up; she is located roughly a kilometer north of here," he reported.

"Alright, let's stop and investigate. Abby and Bart, come with me," I said.

"I'm concerned that—," Bart continued.

"That's alright Bart; you did the right thing," I said, realizing his doubts as well as my own.

As we approached the area, I cautioned the two about the possibility of a trap. "Rouges has done this; they set a trap using such bait—the perfect condition for a compassionate sojourner like COMMUNITY."

"What should we do," Abby asks.

"Wait for my signal. If the situation looks suitable, we will move in—but separately to limit the risks."

IN THE LESSENING

We waited, observing the girl from about twenty meters, then I gave the signal as I made the first move.

“You think it’s a trap,” Bart asked, but I just nodded and continued, signaling them to fan-out.

Having heard my approach, she first recoiled in silence, showing what was either a very good appearance or authentic expression of fear. She was young and seemingly attractive, though her clothes were tattered and filthy. As I stepped back to give her room, I could hear Abby and Bart approaching in the flank, moving closer to us. The woman uttered no words, but just stood there, shaking.



From the peripheral came a figure; first one than another—moving fast toward us. “Run, it’s a trap,” I yelled, as the girl slipped away.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LEAST (of a mostly few)

Stronger than

Stronger than you think, [I am].

- Winnie the Pooh

Sal yelled, "Run" and, without thinking, I grabbed Bart by the hand while the woman dashed by. Behind us, I could here the last moments of the conflict.

"They're chasing us," Bart screamed.

"I know," I yelled, as Bart abruptly stopped and turn to face them. But I saw only one—just one attacker with a stick in hand, swinging it every closer.

Bart lifted his hand in defense, but the stick made made contact, knocking him off his feet. "Run Abby," he said with bloody nose.

The attacker stopped long enough to see the damage and then lunged for me; but as he did, Bart grabbed his ankle bringing him to the earth, fast and hard.

Grunts and groans followed until, finally, the motion stopped, the attacker lay still—evidently impelled by his own stick.

"Bart, are you alright," I managed to say.

Wiping the blood from his face, he nodded while I helped him up.

"We can't stop," he said. "There might be more."

"But what about Sal?"

"He told us to run, and run we will," Bart reminded me.

And so we did; so fast as to find the woman, evidently resting after her own flight.

"Come with us," I told her. She said nothing, but motioned that she would.

The three of us made our way back, immediately reporting to Mat what had happened.

"I know," he said. "Other scouts reported in. I am truly sorry about Sal," he added, looking directly at us. "But I am glad to see you—that you made it through the attack."

"Thanks to Sal and to Bart," I said.

"Yes, much thanks," Mat agreed as he turned his attention to Bart. "That looks pretty nasty."

"It feels pretty nasty too," Bart replied with altered, nasal voice.



"I think your nose is broken."

"How does it look," Bart asks.

"Ah, I think it's an improvement."

"Sure, an improvement."

This day had the worst and the best; it had brought more hardship than we wanted, but less than we planned for. Sal was another great loss--no one could deny that--but his contribution to COMMUNITY was on scale with that of Cal's.

"Bart, this is going to hurt, but we have to reset your nose, " I said just before he screamed from the pain.

"Take some of this; it will help take the edge off the pain."

"What is it?"

"You remember the other night, when Ben was beyond recognition--his new found claimed as a mellow-fellow?"

"Yes," Bart said. "Oh, that should help."

I agreed. If it can make Ben a mellow-fellow, it can help dull such evident pain.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LEAST (of a mostly few)

I have

Tomorrow do thy worst, I have lived today.

- John Dryden (1631-1700); poet, playwright

News of Sal's passing was hard to take. We had come far, he and I. *I will miss my friend very much*, was the immediate thought followed by intermittent grief. "He passed with dignity and honor," I told them. "Sal was all about saving others—having done so again and again." Others had similar sentiments; some, like Bart, testimonies of Sal's sacrifices.

"Mat, about the woman, the one we found," Abby began.

"Yes, how's she doing," I asks.

"She's okay, but still isn't talking. I'm not sure if it's shock or a given state."

"Can I see her," and with that, Abby went to get the woman while I still thought on the loss of Sal.

Moments later, as I saw the two approaching, I recognized the "the woman", he face. "Sam, is that you," I blurted out.

With a moment, Abby responded: "You know her?"

"I think so," I said. "She's got to be...the resemblance," I studded with surprise, of "Sam?"

It's got to be Samantha. It's been so long. I just didn't think that she survived. But Sam remained silent, seemingly unaware of that possibility, our previous relationship. "We played music together. She loves music."

"Did someone say music," Ben interrupted.

"Yes they did Ben. But they're talking professionally...", Abby was remarkably quick to respond.

"This is wonderful. I can't believe after all this time," I repeated, still overwhelmed by her presence.

"It's a small earth," Abby added.

"Not really Abby. I mean, if you really think about it," Ben remarked, attempting to light a fire of some kind.

"It's a figure of speech, a phrase," Abby responded.

"Take it easy sister. Just trying to lighten the load."

"Alright folks, I think we've seen enough action for the day," Mat cut-in.

Those two are like siblings, I thought. They are amusing, a relief; and boy, do I need some right now. Yes, something to lighten the load. As it was, the losses and gains, I think it best that we stop for today and prepare the meal.



"Pass the word Bart: we'll bed here for the night. Let's do something special," I said.

"Good. I'll put Ben on it; he really likes that sort of 'special' thing," Bart added.

"Don't we all," I said. *Don't we all appreciate some relief. I know I do.*

"Tomorrow is another day," Bart replied as he walked away.

Yes, and I hope tomorrow is a better day, I thought as I happened to recall a piece from my favorite literature.

Life is a storm, my young friend. You will bask in the sunlight one moment, be shattered on the rocks the next. What makes you a man is what you do when that storm comes. You must look into that storm and shout as you did in Rome. Do your worst, for I will do mine! Then the fates will know you as we know you.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LEAST (of a mostly few)

Wait and

All human wisdom is summed up in two words;
wait and hope.

- Alexander Dumas

“Groovy, I’ll shake the man down,” hearing the order to plan something special.

“You’ll ‘shake the man down’”, Abby remarked.

“That’s right, I will. Look sister, you just ain’t with it. You don’t get my drift, do you?”

“I’m not with it? Now see here, o’ boy. I’ll show you who’s with it. I am the queen of cool,” Abby annunciated with accelerated annoyance.

“Good, then you can help with tonight’s event,” I said with the satisfaction that she had taken the hook.

“Why you sneaky little—,” she replied as she turned tail in the tracks of Bart. “We’ll see who’s sheek.”

Well that was easy. I’m beginning to like her transformation. Marriage does her well, I thought.

“Hey dude, what’s happening,” came the familiar words of the brother, Arc.

IN THE LESSENING

Given him five, I said: "Oh, just taken care of business, I had to give Abby a rough time just to set her straight."

"Is she alright," Arc asks.

"Yes, she'll get by—no sweat," I assured him.

"Groovy, so what's happenng tonight," he continued.

"We're planning a party, like the another night."

"Cool, count me in," Arc said, seemingly unaffected by the long day.

"Want to help with the planning," I asks him.

"No way dude; it's too much for me and besides, I've got a date," he said with his usual cavalier stance.

"A date? With whom—I mean—whose the woman?"

"Several babes actually," he continued.

"More than one," I asks, feeling some envy.

"Well you know what they say," he remarked.

"No, I don't know what they say...until they've said it," I said, feeling my less carefree than before.

"If you got it, you've got it," he reminded me.

"That doesn't really make sense," I said. "So who are the women?"

"No women, just babes—boys and girls," he explained.

“Let me guess; hide & seek?”

“Could be, although I prefer freeze tag,” Arc remarked.

“Why freeze tag?”

“It’s cool—get it,” he said.

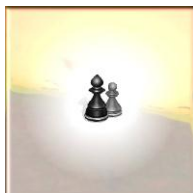
“What about chess. Have they tried to teach you chess yet,” I asks.

“They tried man, but it’s too heavy,” he remarked.

“Heavy?”

“Yeah, ‘heavy’: deep, complex, over-my-head, way-out.”

Arc was becoming legendary in his own right. Of course I was happy for his new found fame. I’m sure I had some part in it. *But chess too heavy? What a small mind*, I thought, *Still, I like him and his lingo too. After all, I am a mellow-fellow.*



IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LEAST (of a mostly few)

Doing what

Courage is about doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared.

- Eddie Rickenbacker (1890-1973); Medal of Honor Recipient

The signs were more evident. "The storm is coming," I said to myself—as though I had to. For several days, I had noticed the movements of the animals; followed by the weather. wind and temperature changes. "Time to turn about." I said, having decided at last.

I don't know why I was drawn to come, but I must turn back; it seems senseless but, if nothing more, I followed my convictions and that is what counts.

As the day passed, I retraced by path; this time absolutely certain of my decision, though still afraid of the circumstances. *Not sure if I'll be able to outpace the storm—just have to wait, hope for the best and plan for the worst.* But how do you plan for a storm when you're on the run? *Okay, I'll just hope for the best.*

As usual, my mind would drift; often reflecting on something preferably pleasant—to distract me from my worries. Here, now, I tried to think about Simon; some of things he taught me.

IN THE LESSENING

Having some time with Simon in his later days, I had an opportunity to learn much; perhaps more than anyone in COMMUNITY. At first, he was reluctant to talk; my questions were met with suspicion and silence—rarely a response other than a word or two.

I thought maybe he had lost his hearing or, worse, his mind; but as I would soon discover, his health was good except for that resulting from years of degradation and detainment. *He did have some scares.*

“Why did they charge you with; the allegations”

“Charges; allegations,” he questioned.

“Yes, how did you violate POLITIC,” I asked.

“Boy, they don’t need charges or allegations. They do what they want, when they want—no matter the reason.”

“Were you afraid,” I continued.

“Why yes, I was scared; but that was not unusual.”

“So you stayed scared,” I said, thinking it so.

“Fear can be a powerful force. I had to be afraid.”

“Your treatment, what did they do...to you,” I said, with the obvious intent of understanding what he endured.

“Well to start, they stripped me naked and tortured me,” he began. “Did they did worse.”

Torture...and worse, I thought. “No wonder you—”

"Yes, they are barbaric ways—trying to compel me to confess, so they said."

"Confess what," I asked.

"Anything that they could use to find others like me, so-called 'enemies of the state'," Simon replied.

"Did you talk; did you tell them anything?"

"Would you," he asked bluntly.

"Yes, I know, but did you tell them everything?"

"I could not tell 'everything', because I knew not everything," he told me. "You cannot confess what you do not know—even if forced."

"Then, did they stop; ah, when you told them that you knew nothing else—nothing more," I continued, testing his patience.



"No, they did not, simply because they did not believe me. So they tortured more; they unloaded their cruelty to within one inch of my life. I was broken and beaten," he told me as his expression grew dark and distant.

"And by some miracle, you survived."

"Some of part of me survived, its obvious, but they beat some of me away. Again, I was broken; body and spirit—as was their intention all along."

"And after that...", I asked, more or less knowing.

"I eventually was exiled to a labor camp; and there, to spend the last of my days under guard, in shakles and subject to their service," Simon continued, though not without struggle.

"But you escaped; you got away, of course."

"One of us had died. The guards came and put his body in a large sack. I overheard them; they would come back to get the body to dispose of it. I removed the corpse and placed myself in the sack. They threw me into the great waters instead of him."

Startled from my thoughts by a thunder clap, I was returned to my present effort to evade the storm; and still a final thought came to me:

It is the way of weakened minds to see everything through a black cloud. The soul forms its own horizons; your soul is darkened, and consequently the sky of the future appears stormy and unpromising.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE LEAST (of a mostly few)

Knowing what

If a man does not know what port he is steering for, no wind is favorable to him.

- Seneca; Roman statesman, philosopher

They are gone and I am here, alone. It has been good, this life and living, and now I await the end of the beginning. But now, I reflect on the Roman Empire.

And how did it happen; the decline, the collapse, the fall? Was it merely the failures of men or was it something more—something supernatural—beyond man, his faults and failings?

And POLITIC lived on it: campaigns and elections, duties and decisions, fealty and fidelity—everything was fueled and forced by it. Thus, the road to favor and fortune was paved, not with a firm foundation, but with riches of anything demoniated in the silver denarius.

And Conflict is something we live with, as they too lived it. Empires live with continuous conflict until they die, until the end of one and the beginning of another. And such conflict always had a cause; though the cause may be created or, the real one, concealed by concerns or constitutions. Yes, the republic—or whatever you want to call it—is convinced, with coercion, that the cause be carried no matter the conditions and consequences, the inevitable collapse.

IN THE LESSENING

And a crisis with many credits over the continuum of civilization, conflict remains vivid in the last of generation, after which, the conditions and consequences are remembered no more—and the cycle continues.

And to finance all this conflict, this fighting? How is to be done? Taxes, tariffs, tolls have limits; thus, turn to international sources of financing—that lend to spend, so the trajedictory of debt, decline, default, destruction, dying, death, and desolation.

And who was to do this fighting? “Who was to do it—besides us?” As conflict continued, the legions became increasingly filled by foreign fighters and mercenaries. No longer did nationals consider soldiering as a gateway to greatness. Loyalties and allegiance changed from that of the sovereign to others; perhaps those with wealth—the proprietors of power and possession.



And the cultural decline or decadence; a society that is morally debased. And if it had the capacity to possess a soul, it has surrendered such; forgotten who or what it was—or could have been. This cultural decline was discovered in art of stone; sculptures showing decay, not just structural, but moral tandem with the trajedictory....

And leadership; POLITICS that purports to freedom when, in fact, it is more fiefdoms—a system of Lords and peasants, masters and slaves, haves and have-nots. Again, it has forgotten who or what it was—or could have been—on the final road to serfdom.

IN THE LESSENING

And the central question could have been: "Who was serving whom, or what?" But then, the simple answer could have been, was or is: "Who cares?"

And loyalties; that in the cycle of complex societies, the inevitable return to slavery from slavery as convenience leads to complacency and....

And hypocrisy; the deliberate deviations from words to actions, as "the most worthless of mankind are not afraid to condemn in others the same disorders which they allow in themselves." ¹¹¹

And "Panem et Circensus", bread and circus, was the formula for the well-being of the population, pleasures such as: the distribution of food, public baths, gladiators, exotic animals, chariot races, sports competition, and theater representation. It was an efficient instrument in the hands of the Emperors to keep the population peaceful, and at the same time giving them the opportunity to voice themselves in these places of performance.

And the authority; the church and the state—a marriage that was not made in heaven—and did not end corruption but, to the contrary, expanded it in the sacred submission to the state.

¹¹¹ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

And the sacred; what of the sacred?

The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful.¹¹²

And now, having reflected on the end, I turn to my end here, in this place and time.

¹¹² Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DAY (of a different dawn)

Dance within

For every day that there is sunshine, there
will be days of rain, it's how we dance within
them both that show our love and pain.

- Joey Tolbert; poet

"Yes, you need to keep this stuffing in your nose; it will help in the healing and resetting," I advised Bart. His pain was not the broken nose alone, but Bart was missing Sal. "I know Bart. I miss him too—as we all do."

"I just can't believe he is gone. Only this morning, I woke thinking that he was here, only to remind myself—"

"Maybe he is here; maybe Sal is still present in some form," I suggested.

"I'm serious Abby!"

"So am I," I said abruptly. "We have had this sense before, about those who passed. Stranger things have happened in COMMUNITY, but we cannot deny the supernatural occurrences that happen in THE LIGHT."

"So your saying that spirits are present; that those before us can somehow return and make their presense known," Bart followed.

"Yes, I believe so—and I am not alone—as I already described examples. Would you like more detail," I asked.

"Not right now, but later," he replied. "I just don't feel able with the pain, the medication."

"I understand that too; the effects of cannibus can do that," I said, still intending to reassure him.

Changing the subject, he asked: "Where are we?"

"We are about 20 kilometers from our destination. Barring that the weather is with us, we should be there tomorrow," I explained.

Bart and I were really beginning to understand each—as with no relationship I could remember. Our progress came mostly in love, which was making all the difference in the world. I did love and appreciate the others. I too was feeling grief over Sal. But my love for Bart was different; it was deeper—which made up for our differences and indifferences, those parts of our life that made it difficult for each of us to even love ourselves, let alone another.

"Abby, have you seen my shirt, the green one?"

"Not since that last time you were wearing it."

"I can't believe—"

"Oh wait a minute. You were wearing that shirt Tuesday; you know, the trap and your nose."

Bart look confused, still less than lucid.

"It had blood all over it. I buried it."

"I liked that shirt," he said.

"You mean you would have kept it," I asked, "with all the blood stains."

"Oh yes. It would give me the image I need to survive—like a rouge or warrior," he suggested.

"So that's the image you want; one of that sort?"

"Not all the time, but sometimes a savage."

"I think I can see why. You want to be brave; a blood shirt symbolizes such, am I right?"

"That's it. Being a barbarian has it's rewards."

"I'll remember that next time," I added.

"Next time?"

"Yes, the next time you get your head bashed-in or some other part of your body bloodied," I said.

"Good. I'll just have to make sure I'm not wearing a red one, or one too dark to show the stain."

Laughing, I said: "We'll plan on it."

Some of the group was really beginning to show fatigue, as with Bart. A few were being carried; some children and an elder or two. But we were close.

"The wind is really strengthening," Bart had to yell to be heard.

"Yes, it's probably at about twenty knots now; and increase from five just an hour ago," Ben yelled back.

"Ben, what was the song you were singing the other night, I said, moving closer to Ben.

"You mean 'mellow-fellow'?"

"No, not that night; the next one," I clarified.

"I don't remember; it could have been 'There's a New World Coming'; or maybe, 'Bad Moon'. But it could have been 'Till the End of the Day' or maybe, 'Live for Today', but I'm not sure."

"No, I think you said something about 'Guess Who'," I said, still searching.

"Oh yes, 'Share the Land'" singing, "baby I'll be there—," he said, breaking into the melody.

"I like that one; but you can stop singing it."

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DAY (of a different dawn)

Of growing up

The turning point in the process of growing up is when you discover the core of strength within you that survives all hurt.

- Max Lerner; journalist

“Arc, you’re a blast,” Matt blurted-out.

“I am?”

“Yes; if I understand the term, you are—,” Mat added.

“Yah, a blast. That works!”

“So your indifferent; you don’t care one way or the other,” Mat asked as though unsure.



“What I mean is that it’s cool—it’s alright.”

“Oh, okay. I’m still having some trouble with the translation. Not as fast as Ben on the Hip.” And with a pause, he continued: “So you’re keeping your strength, are you?”

“Sure, this trip ain’t that bad. I’ve had much worse,” I said. “Why, what’s up?”

"I was just asking because we need you; more so, Ben needs you as a reminder to take a load off," Matt added with a grin.

"Yeah, he get's heavy—real heavy," I said.

"Yes, Ben's a detailed dude to be sure. But he means well, don't you think?"

"I can dig it. He's a righteous dude too," I added.

"So tell me Arc; where did you pick-up this Hip, these terms," Matt asked.

"I read it, studied it; a book I found in the library," I explained. "You did hassle me about reading, learning, so I finally broke-down and pick-up one."

"If you mean encourage, yes, I did do that," he said in a sober tone. "And look at you now."

"No sweat," I said. "It was piece of cake."

Times were a-changin; my journey—as they call it—beginning to change me in ways I could not have got before. "The book I mentioned, the one with the terms, was ancient stuff—something dated from the 60's. Some words from a folk singer, Dylan, that haunt me," I said as I begin to sing:

Come mothers and fathers throughout the land, and don't criticize what you can't understand, your sons and your daughters are beyond your command; your old road is rapidly aging. Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand, for the times they are a-changin'.

"Bob Dylan," Ben broke-in, looking over my shoulder. "He was legendary in a time before—"

"You know this dude," I said with surprise.

"No, not really, He was a leader in the folk revival of the 1950's—long before my time."

"Folk, revival," I asked.

"It was a kind of music, a genre, 'folk'," Ben said, expecting me to get-it.

"I kind of music," I said.



"Really more than that, it was a way of life for common persons, 'folks', to express their ideas and feelings."

"So the folks had their own songs," I said, still curious.

"Yes, and more even, they wrote and sang about life, their life and that of others; stories of ordinary, common life in a time of much turmoil."

"Sounds like a drag," I said, still unable to really see the similarity to our life, here.

"Maybe, but these folks really lived the life; they suffered and sacrificed—," Ben continued.

"Sounds like COMMUNITY," I said.

"Yes, it does—it is similar. They had their own 'metro' to deal with—as do we."

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DAY (of a different dawn)

Precise moment when

We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is at last a drop which makes it run over; so in a series of kindness there is at last one which makes the heart run over.

- Dr. Samuel Johnson; poet, essayist, lexicographer

“You’re good to me.”

“And you you’re good for me,” Abby replied in kind.

I had wondered what would have happended had COMMUNITY not rescued me—if they had not been there for me. But then, what would life and living be like without Abby? *It would be less, much less.*

“What was that Bart,” Abby asks.

“Oh nothing. I was just thinking about your comments; about the possibility of the passing from this place: the possibility of life after life.”

“Oh, it’s not a possibility Bart,” I replied.

“I know, you believe it,” I said, frustrated over her faith and the lack of my own.

“And so will you, in time and place,” she reassured me.

IN THE LESSENING

She was right; in another time and place I would believe it to. I would sense the presense of Sal in moments; not a memory, but a realness that he was there, with me, teaching or talking as before. There would be times when I felt alone and rejected—even with Abby at my side—and yet would then feel as though he or the others had never left or passed.

“Only five kilometers to go,” came the words that I had been waiting to hear most. *Only a small distance to go. When we get there, I am going to give this face a long soaking in a cold creek. That should help kill the pain,* I thought.

“Bart, when we get there, let’s get you some cold water for your nose,” Abby said, as though reading my thoughts.

“Good idea Abby,” I said, startled by the coincidence.

As we pressed on, Arc made his way toward us. With him, in his arms, was one of the children that had taken to him.

“I thought you liked to lighten the load, Arc,” Ben blurted out.

“I do man. I’m a simple man,” Arc replied.

“I meant the child,” Ben replied.

“Yeah, she’s hurt’en; she was crying most of the morning, so I gave her a lift,” Arc explained.

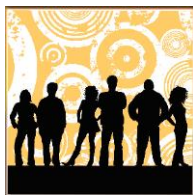
“You are the man,” Abby exclaimed.

"Of course he's a man," I said, not realizing that the phrase was yet another of Arc's growing lingo.

"No, he's 'the man'," Abby emphasized with impatience. "Never mind Bart."

"Oh yeah, Hip," I said with hesitation. "Anyway."

We continued together, occasionally sharing our opinions or, in the case of Abby, facts. *This is what happens when you hang around Ben to long, I thought. Fiction becomes fact; one's personal will, a way of life to be accepted by each and all.*



"This is a wicked wind," Arc said, seemingly unaware of the severe weather until now.

Looking at Abby, I responded, "Right on, Arc."

And a tempest she is...the gail winds that, to our advantage, is pushing us each step of the way.

"Nothing to worry," remarked Abby, "it just pushing us to a better time and place."

"I see," once again astonished at how she seemed to know my thoughts.

Visibility was poor, and getting worse; it was darkening as though the evening. Some rain was now beginning to fall as I heard the horn sound.

"We must be at the limits," I shouted above the wind.

"It couldn't be...not yet," Abby shouted. "Must be something else."

"I can't see what's up; it maybe trouble." Ben yelled, as he turned to run.

As I wiped my eyes, I could see Ben bolting toward the head of our ranks. Almost instantly, he stumbled over a rock, rolled and recovered—and continued his advance as though nothing could stop him now.

"Wipe-out," Arc screamed, seeing the fall as well.

"Almost," I yelled. "More like rock & roll."

Idle to await the outcome, we were getting drenched by the rain, now heavier and more fierce. *I guess that this is just another form of the cool water Abby suggested for my nose*, I thought, trying the most of this moment. *We have come this far. How sorrowful it might be if we still did not reach our new home.*

"Don't worry Bart. We're almost home," Abby shouted as she wiped her face.

"Keep the faith dude," Arc resounded, unsure of how relevant his words were or would be.

Running equally reckless as he left, Ben yelled, "It's alright, they're scouts," came the reason for our delay though the indication that we had made it.

The horn blew again, signaling us to continue in the every mounting storm of what we had never seen or since that time and place.

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DAY (of a different dawn)

When you believe

There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning.

- Louis L'Amour; author

I had made good time, amazed at how quickly I had redoubled my tracks. But then again, when you have something big pressing, you can do amazing things.

My mental travel was evidently more of a distraction that I realized; I was beat, but until now, it hadn't hit me. *I've got to stop before I fall.* And so I did under the shelter of some rock crevace.

As to how long I slept, again, time was not apparent. *The sky looks as darks as before; more even.*

Traveling in the dark was dangerous for several reasons. Fortunately I had remembered enough landmarks to offset the poor visibility. *Remember to thank Mat for this one,* I thought to myself. *This is one of his skills, survival in such as setting.*

Still, this storm may very exceed anything that Matt had ever seen or considered. I had been warned, it's true; but I think that even such warnings will underestimate the wrath the lies ahead.

Arriving within the limits of the village, I knew now that they were gone except for the remains of Cal who had passed perhaps hours earlier. "Be at peace," I said, laying at his side where his open journal showed the last entry:

Do not let yourself be bothered by the inconsequential. One has only so much time in this world, so devote it to the work and the people most important to you, to those you love and things that matter. One can waste half a lifetime with people one doesn't really like, or doing things when one would be better off somewhere else. ¹¹³

"I must leave this place," were my last words; though in my thoughts was the realization that he would never leave me and I seem to remember such promises.

Several days later, I found myself at the base of Cheaha mountain, making my ascent to the location detailed in Cal's journal as the "safe harbor".

All had gone remarkably well to this point both coming and going; so my confidence was high—but perhaps too high. A creek that seemed the least difficult, was my downfall: slipping on the rocks, I landed on my back, my head fast against the creek's shallow bed.

Oh man, ah, blood, I realized as I lifted myself from my fall and felt its warmth coming down my back. *Got to try to stop the bleeding.*

¹¹³ Louis L'Amour; author.

IN THE LESSENING

On the shoals of the creek, a dark muddy mixture might do the trick. *Just the right consistency, but I'll have to stop to let it dry.* As I begin to pad it on the wound, nausea came on me. *Mild concussion; it's making me sick,* and then I went faint.

As before, my awakening was met with some disorientation; but this time, with a severe headache and some lingering nausea. *Good, the bleeding has stopped.* Lifting myself up again, the faintness returned; this time, I caught myself quick enough to gain my footing. *Okay, I'll wait here for a spell.*

The temperature had been dropping and, for the first time, a chill was setting in. *I've got to find a dry spot, get out of these clothes, and get warm,* I realized. *Else, hypothermia may come.* Once more, a credit to Mat, I remembered. Finding this dry spot was crucial—even if I had to crawl to get there. So off I went fortunately discovering a dilapidated shed about 30 meters creekside. I collapsed, but not before covering myself in foilage.

And with the lapse of more time—as it seemed—I dreamed this: Sal was beside me, nudging me to awake. “You’re in danger Wes. Wake up,” he repeated with increasing urgency. *Fine time to tell me that,* I thought. *I have already incurred the injury.* But with his persistence, I came out of it and there, several meters away, were wild dogs; three of them, with tusk-like fangs. I was barely conscious, if at all, as the larger one lunged at me, the other smaller ones, behind it. Reflexive beyond my recollection, my hand grabbed the first thing it touched. Close enough to smell its foul breath, the beast reeled as my arm

IN THE LESSENING

came crashing down. Not sure of what I had done—if I had done anything—the beast flied and fell back as quickly as it had attacked. *What happened*, I thought as I drew a blank stare on starkness. *They're gone.*

But then, were they every here?



When I awoke again, the headache and nausea had subsided. *How many hours had I been unconscious, I don't know; but am I hungry, oh yes.*

Turning to the training that I had come to depend on, I forged the area for food and started a fire. Several hours passed as I recovered my confidence and courage lost at the creek and amid the dogs. *And now to restart;, to begin my ascent up the mountain and at last, home again.*

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DAY (of a different dawn)

Make your own

Everyone has a story. Make your own worth telling.

- Patrick Ricketts (born 1989); life long learner

“Hey mellow-fellow, who are these folks,” Arc asked as we were approached and greeted.

“Those who arrived here earlier; some of them you may recognize,” I answered. “They have been making preparations for our stay.”

“So they’ve got the place jammed-up and jelly tight,” Arc said with the every popular lingo, Hip.

“Not quite,” Bart responded. “It’s impossible to prepare to perfection given the time, conditions and all. We’ll just have to accept the accomplishments and live with it, right?”

And the conditions were getting worse; the weather had a strangeness like none I could ever remember. “What about the shelter,” I asked

“I was told that they have a back-up plan; as it is, the make-shift shelters want last with this wind,” Bart continued.

“Don’t you mean tempest,” Abby chimed in.

“Whatever you say,” Bart answered back.

"Good for you; it's better to just agree," I said before realizing what Bart knew all too well.

"I'm totally with you," he replied.

"Yeah, let it ride," Arc added in his usual Hip. "Just let the sunshine in," he continued.

"We could really use some sunshine," I added as though the weather would call for it.

"Totally agree Ben, but as is—," Bart began

"Ain't no sunshine when he comes," Arc followed.

"More like, as it comes," I added.

"And come, it has; the storm of—," Bart continued.

"The century, maybe more...."

We each and all agreed, this storm was strange; days of darkness would follow along with sustained wind and rain. The planning and preparation could not completely cover these kinds of conditions—not enough time and resources.

"You think we'll survive," Arc said, showing some signs of serious beyond his usual Hipster character.

"I don't know Arc. I trust that everything that could be has been done; but even if that's not accurate, we have what we have," Mat said.

"And what do we have," Arc asked with sincerity.

"Well, you've been here, with COMMUNITY, long enough; you tell me," Mat asked.

"You say we have THE WAY," Arc replied.

"Yes, I have said that—and we live it too," Matt responded. "But what do you say? Do you accept it—as living and life?"

"I'm not sure. I mean, I think the way you know what others are thinking; it's righteous but far-out," Arc explained. "I've noticed that Abby has that ability," he continued. "It is deep for sure, but it's also weird and way-out—like the mind-control at METRO."

"Yes, I have it too; the ability to read thoughts," I interrupted. "At least I'm working on it," I added as Abby looked at me with a questionable expression.

The storm raged-on while we waited in with our shelter, sustenance and sleep. And as the fire warmed our bodies, the rich conversation warmed our souls.

"So Ben, can you see far-out into the future?"

"I said I was working on it Arc, but to be precise, I can't," I answered. "I mean, I really can't want something that is, well, a gift."

"A gift? You mean seeing the future is a gift, from THE WAY," he asked.

I was really glad to see Arc asking serious questions for a change. It was good to see him growing-out of who he was, and was not, in the METRO.

“Yes, it’s called THE LIGHT. It is a gift that illuminates what lies ahead—what the future holds,” I said as I went on to explain how THE LIGHT has kept us alive. “Unlike METRO, that relies on technology, we have this gift; it is far superior to that which METRO has—or ever could—in spite of what appears.”

“So it’s a talisman, this light?”



“Something more than Arc; not only does it bring us fortune, but it allows us to plan for the future—by knowing what is to come.” I went on with the details. “It not tangible, like an object, but it is evident; it does manifest through us, some of us.”

“Why Abby? Why does she have the gift?”

“Good question Arc,” I said as I took a moment to reflect. “We each and all have our story—our experiences in life and living—and, for Abby, this includes this particular gift.”

“So she’s special?”

“Such gifts are not only for the person, but for COMMUNITY. We each can have such gifts though we’re not perfect. ‘The important work of moving the world forward does not wait to be done by perfect men.’”¹¹⁴

“Moving the world; that’s far-out.”

¹¹⁴ George Eliot [Mary Ann Evans] (1819-1880); Novelist, Editor

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DAY (of a different dawn)

We live for

Life becomes harder for us when we live for others, but it also becomes richer and happier.

- Albert Schweitzer; philosopher, physician, Nobel Peace Prize winner

"We will be relocating to that stone area as soon as possible." *We can't wait any longer*, I realized. *This storm may be the end of us yet.*

"I don't think so Matt," Abby spoke confidently.

"Well, if you believe than so do I."

Ben's dream had stayed with me; a vivid image of the storm's wrath and wake. Sometimes dreams and visions are misleading, but I had to consider this one—even if Ben is young when it comes to the THE LIGHT.

We all have our time machines. Some take us back, they're called memories. Some take us forward, they're called dreams.¹¹⁵

I have them too; some come about, but others I don't know about. At first I was scared, not necessarily of the dream, but sharing it—only to see it die on the vine. Some might call me a fraud, with all the bitter feelings. *I can't risk the rejection with all that I have experienced.*

¹¹⁵ Jeremy Irons.

IN THE LESSENING

It was bad enough growing-up in a time and place of such cruelty, rejected and ridiculed, and as to why I was not sure. They said things but, after some thought, most were not true—not even close. *I can still remember the pain, the shame. Why me, why us?*

I was advised not to dwell on the past, but advice could not replace my repulsion for those responsible. *Maybe it is I who is bitter*, I would think as I rehashed these memories.

But then I ended-up here, in COMMUNITY, and was free to speak my mind, to express feelings, and to learn about forgiving too.

In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.¹¹⁶

And I discovered that I was not the only one living with disappointment; there was, or is, much misery to go around. *But there can never be no great disappointment where there is not Love.*¹¹⁷

And there has been forgiveness; a rekindling of the inner spirit, I was reminded as the fires burned bright about me. *Yes, there is an inner glow that warms me—all my worries aside.*

“Any other insights to impart on at this time, Abby?”

¹¹⁶ Albert Schweitzer.

¹¹⁷ Martin Luther King Jr.

"Nothing at the moment Mat, but I'll let you know if I hear or see anything."

"Oh Bart, while I'm thinking about it; some important information to pass on to you," I informed him.

"What's that," Bart asks.

"It's about the shuttle derailement; the cause—that was gnawing at you," I continued.

"Oh, yes, I had almost forget," Bart said with hesitation.

"Just before we left the village, Cal had received some information from one of his sources. I say this without confirmation of the facts, but it seems that the accident was no accident; it was planned—the shuttle set with explosives by agents of MATI."

After a moment of silence, Bart asked: "Why would someone sabotage it? All the death and—"

"While I can't understand the reason Bart, my sense is that they were trying to use it as a message or, perhaps, to trigger another event," Ben explained.

"What do you think Mat," Bart asked.

"He could be right. This is not the first of such efforts. An empire or state will go to great length to retain its power and position, replete with covert and clandestine plans and activities."

"What a waste," Bart remarked with disgust.

"Another of the many talents of empire," Ben added.

As we shared more on this matter, news came that Wes had returned. Of course, I ran to greet him—he was like a brother to me—and gave thanks each step of the way.

"How are you friend. I can't tell you how happy it makes me to see your face again," I told him as we embraced.

"Same here, Mat. But to answer your question, I am weary with a major headache, empty stomach, and soaked body," he said with expected exhaustion.



"Well, you came to the right place," I reassured him. "Grab some grub and let's deal with the rest."

"Oh, and have a nice day" Arc said, expressing his own form of happiness that his friend had returned.

I'm still trying to get that lingo, Hip, I thought. Seems less than sincere to offer "a nice day" in such a moment, but then, Hip is said to be about love, peace, and other such goodness. Maybe Arc has it right; after all, a nice day is something very special.

"Yes it is," Abby spoke-up. "It sure beats The Establishment's lies."

Who is 'The Establishment'?

IN THE LESSENING

IN THE DAY (of a different dawn)

For human souls

What greater thing is there for human souls
than to feel that they are joined for life - to
be with each other in silent unspeakable
memories?

- George Elliot, novelist, editor

The storm lasted for almost two weeks; the skies remains darked with shifting and violent outbursts of twisters and turmoil. Dry land long representing the coastline of the great waters to the east was no more; it would remain permanently part of the seabed. Creeks became rivers and floodzones and, like the shoreline, was taken by marine life. Untold numbers drowned and were destroyed, their habitats bottomed-out or washed to the sea. Now, the great waters were less than 200 kilometers away.

Much of METRO was not exempt from the storm; and although it had weathered many a climatic event, it could not withstand the strength of this storm that worked its way into the bottomless pit, the subterranean civilization. In the wake of the storm was a swath resembling a strange surface never seen. Only a relative few, METRO's leadership, apparently escaped the destructon.

Dreams of such a storm had long existed; indeed, such potential had been published by the military decades

IN THE LESSENING

prior. But as to the cause; well, this was something that was not yet known by COMMUNITY. Was it naturally-occurring, manmade or some combination? What is certain however is that the storm brought radical changes in a post-Lessening period of this time and place. None of us would forget this event, the many that it swallowed-up like the Leviathan of the ages.

The sun seen for the first time in over two weeks; the air and sky was clear, clean and cloudless.

“Shocking blue,” Arc exclaimed, as he reacted to the brilliant sky. “What that’s weird thing?”

Looking in the direction, Ben replied: “I’m not sure Arc. It could be a planet or a star.”

“It’s a planet; ‘Venus’ is the name,” Abby followed.

“Abby, I think you win the prize,” Mat said, as thought to confirm that she was right.

“Yeah baby, she’s got it,” Arc added, as Ben just shook his head and grinned.

“Okay, now that we’ve named the strange, new planet, what’s next,” Wes asked.

“Well I can’t speak for the rest of you, but I think Ben should plan us a celebration, a gathering,” Bart suggested. “He seems to enjoy being this role.”

“Good thinking Bart. Ben how ‘bout it; are you feeling mellow, fellow?”

IN THE LESSENING

"Whatever," Ben began. "I guess I can with a little help from my friends."

And he got even more help than he needed. So with some help, the evening was planned and prepared for a great gathering; many thankful souls who know the meaning of sacrifice and suffering, the losses of life and living, in THE WAY.

"I don't know, Abby. With the storm, who knows what lies ahead," Bart said, responding to a question.

"Dude, have you forgotten who you're married to. You know, the 'tempest'," Arc whispered, pulling Bart aside, as though to conceal his advice from her.

"Almost Arc, but thanks for reminding me," Bart said with a sheepish grin on his face.

"Just call me 'Mariah'," Abby added.

"Mariah," I asked, not familiar with that name.

"Yes Mariah; it means a strong wind, like 'tempest'."

"Now Abby, I meant nothing by that remark," Arc began in an attempt of a rare apology.

"Oh, I like your word, Arc. It's cool, but powerful."

"Right-on sister," Arc replied with assurance.

"If you folks are through with the wind, we are gathering now at the fire," Ben said with some sarcasm.

IN THE LESSENING

The brilliant sky bidding goodnight, and Venus no longer visible, a full moon was rising in its place—as well as a host of heavenly bodies.

“I wish the others were with us tonight,” Wes remarked as he took in the wonder of the moment.

“Oh, I think they are; no, I know they are,” came a voice vaguely familiar.



“Sam, you’ve got your voice back,” I said, excited to hear her speak.

“I do Mat, and my music too. So what about a song?”

And so she began as we followed along in the words:
There's a new world coming, and it's just around
the bend. There's a new world coming. This one's
going to an end. There's a new voice calling. You
can hear it if you try, and it's growing stronger
with each day that passes by.

There's a brand new morning, rising clear and
sweet and free. There's a new day dawning that
belongs to you and me. Yes a new world's coming.
The one we've had visions of, coming in peace,
coming in joy, coming in love, coming in peace,
coming in joy, coming in love. ¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Mama Cass Elliot, “New World Coming”, 1970.

IN THE LESSENING

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IN THE KNOW (of what's to come)

Global events play a significant part during and following the EVE (of the lessening). The circumstances of globalization¹¹⁹ lend evermore to the possibility of a *one world order*; yet there are those who believe that such developments are, on balance, the mark of very dangerous and destructive times.¹²⁰

We are not going to achieve a new world order without paying for it in blood as well as in words and money.¹²¹

A paradox is (or could be) that the more intense the integration of peoples, the more likely or certain of violent resistance.¹²² How is such "resistance" reduced, so as to ease the arrival of these times (however undesired or welcomed these times may be)?



¹¹⁹ Globalization as a term for international integration arising from interchange of worldviews, products, ideas and other aspects of culture (wikipedia.org/wiki/Globalization)

¹²⁰ This statement is referring to any number of fears pertaining to a one-world order: loss of sovereignty-identity, religious oppression, and surrender of local-regional governance to name a few of the more significant fears.

¹²¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., historian, assistant to John F. Kennedy.

¹²² One example that comes to mind is public school, racial integration, in the U.S., 1960's/70's caused increased contention.

IN THE LESSENING

Fear creates a prevailing condition of helplessness that renders “those” who might otherwise reject-resist to submit-comply.

Fear stifles our thinking and actions. It creates indecisiveness that results in stagnation. I have known talented people who procrastinate indefinitely rather than risk failure. Lost opportunities cause erosion of confidence, and the downward spiral begins.¹²³

Such deep-felt fear is what prevails on the EVE of the lessening. But as to what to specifically fear, well that depends on what is most desired to protect or preserve.

Before the times of this story, many fell into the spell of fear; they gave in (or gave-out) as the once diverse and distributed world closed-in on them. Those who did not heed the siren call endured special treatment; as George Orwell so aptly put it:

You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves.¹²⁴

Such times have been studied; of once great nation-states, even empires, that cycled-through multiple phases from birth to eventual death—whether by incremental and/or catastrophic events. Books and other media offer much detail as to what happened and why. And by understanding the past we can more likely avoid repeating it; that is, as long as such is available, accessible and appreciated.

¹²³ Charles Stanley.

¹²⁴ George Orwell, 1984.

Again, George Orwell:

The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.¹²⁵

But fear is something that precludes knowledge and understanding; that whether an impulse, phobia or prevailing condition, our reaction is largely emotional. Fear pervades our lives, individually and collectively, and can lead to functional or literal death.

Fear isn't so difficult to understand. After all, weren't we all frightened as children? Nothing has changed since Little Red Riding Hood faced the big bad wolf. What frightens us today is exactly the same sort of thing that frightened us yesterday. It's just a different wolf. This fright complex is rooted in every individual.¹²⁶

Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live.¹²⁷

Technology seems to expose and educate us to so much—even to the extent of feeding us what we want to hear and believe.¹²⁸ We are on-line, linked and connected

¹²⁵ George Orwell.

¹²⁶ Alfred Hitchcock.

¹²⁷ Source: Dorothy Thompson

(brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_fear.html#iIuUkqAVeJ1rpqLm.99).

¹²⁸ This statement simply points out that “the truth” (or anything resembling it) is not necessarily what we want to know or hear about (perhaps because it could cause anger, fear or otherwise discomfort or inconvenience).

to the Free World ¹²⁹ (never mind your family or community).

We can watch or listen to reports. We can similarly observe those reporting on those who report (or do the reporting). And finally, we listen to those that refute the claims of those reporting on their reporting.¹³⁰ So never before, with all nations and empires considered, has communication been so an enabler for the good, the bad, and the ugly.

As another paradox (referring to the earlier “integration of peoples”), this “enabler” has extreme possibilities relative to fear and its effects.¹³¹ Consider this scenario: watching a video, a seemingly unjust-violent act (whether the act was orchestrated-scripted or not) renders immediate and righteous outrage on what appears as “real” reporting. After some moment, the outrage subsides with the sense that nothing that can be done; the fact is that it has already happened and, besides, society has become more violent. Why remain outraged when passion cannot be satisfied? The symptoms of apathy coming-on, the momentary fix is to blithely scroll to the next article or video, void or absent the images that only moments ago aroused the ire.

¹²⁹ Free World: a Cold-War term suggesting non-dictatorial government but, in fact, including non-Communist regimes.

¹³⁰ This description of “reporting” is something observed in mainstream news; layers of reporting produced-looped to fill the 24x7 schedule with opinion presented as facts, views as conclusions, and other misinformation.

¹³¹ Referring to the general uses of communication for all manner of reasons and intended outcomes.

IN THE LESSENING

“Give them bread & circus and they will never revolt.” ¹³²

But on to global events; and in particular what might be included in the timeline on the EVE of THE LESSENING, in the period of “Natural and Manmade Catastrophe”.

Suffice to say that most of what I will share has either happened or is expected to happen, sooner or later; but broadly described, these events have been



(or will be) environmental, economic and energy-related. But further still, conflict and contention will culminate to unprecedented levels of damage and destruction—displacing some as refugees or survivors of the most modern weapons unimaginable.

Regions of great power to the East will rise (or resurrect) a global authority, forming an alliance with portions of the Far East. This development will begin (or has begun) in the course of environmental, economic and energy-related events endemic of the modern, global world.

¹³² A phrase coined by a Roman poet lamenting the continuing slide of his former Roman Republic into dictatorship.

In the early stages of this development are exchanges of power and, in some degree, the continuation of conflict and contention, setting-the-stage for one-world government. This plan has, or plans have, some direct connection far beyond COMMUNITY.

COMMUNITY is a part of us; it gives us some roots planted in common-ground, some strength by which to work the ground, and some satisfaction in collecting-consuming the produce among and between ourselves, our society. So simply put, COMMUNITY builds (on) social strength.

One-world government ("The State") does **not**; indeed, The State acquires (conquers and confiscates) its power and position from society.¹³³ To satisfy the beast¹³⁴ (as though that is possible), society must be disassembled-dismembered, even destroyed if necessary, in the acquisition or seizure of power. All matters pertaining to social strength must be (or have been) examined down to the very detail of the individual, putting in place the policy¹³⁵, within or beyond the law, to transfer social strength to political power—to elevate The State to new,

¹³³ This relationship is described by Albert Nock in more than one of his publications. "The positive testimony of history is that the State invariably had its origin in conquest and confiscation. No primitive State known to history originated in any other manner."

¹³⁴ This illustration of State is loosely referenced to the term, "Leviathan", featured in a number of classic publications by Robert Higgs and Thomas Hobbes.

¹³⁵ Not "policy" necessarily in the formal sense, but more a universal practice or program (as part of the plans).

unchartered heights that combine ministry, mercantilism and military.¹³⁶

So yes, there is some connection—even down to each COMMUNITY that struggles to carve-out an existence in the shadow of The State. But while there is some connection, there is also some clear distinction that separates the few from the many, one or more:

Civilization has been a continuous struggle of the individual or of groups of individuals against the State and even against "society," that is, against the majority subdued and hypnotized by the State and State worship.¹³⁷

Call it an event or phases but "the plans" for preeminent, political power are ongoing and observable; it is not merely grist for the mill of conspiracy our conjecture, but in fact, is happening before our eyes—regardless of whether we want to see it or not.

In virtually all of our "vital statistics", social and communicable activity is waning; apathy is growing, while much of our attention is distracted or altogether disengaged—as part of "the plans" to isolate or atomize the many from what the few can do, have done or undone.

But back to global events surrounding "Natural and Manmade Catastrophe"; the possibilities of what could

¹³⁶ The State will acquire-absorb all major sources of worldly-human power to include religious, economic and political.

¹³⁷ Emma Goldman.

IN THE LESSENING

(or will) happen. The alliance, made-up of the regions to the East/Far East, will engage the West. In this first-strike or nuclear attack, key military posts/cities will be destroyed thus weakening the West as a predominate power.

In such a nuclear catastrophe there are multiple consequences (of which I am not familiar) but, in general, the environment is reduced in all aspects of a society—leading to further adverse consequences, even casualties, in the intense competition for survival. This manmade catastrophe marks a key event, and ushers in new era of indefinite-irreversible lessening.

Not only nuclear attack (and the aftermath), but other subsequent events lead to major movements of survivors in the most affected areas.¹³⁸ With electrical and other vital utilizes inoperable for months at a time, the unimaginable becomes reality—lending to migration as the possibility for those strong enough to endure the experience.

There were those who were prepared; who were able to insulate themselves from the immediate and even lasting effects of the strike. So while the majority of those still living must endure varying degrees of the aftermath, a relative few have managed to escape the event, waiting-it-out for the right period/conditions to return or resurface.

¹³⁸ The military posts as targets, dense populations would incur the greatest impact, lesser populations and outlying areas in degree.

For months-on-end the chaos and crisis prevails. Less affected areas are unable to begin the clean-up or recovery (of the most impacted areas)—much less establish local order given prolonged, systems' failures. A physical description of what this chaos and crisis might look like is captured in the images of dimmed skies overshadowing the distressed structures of the modern world featured in the film, *The Road*.¹³⁹

And if the crisis was not enough already, the after-effects cause or contribute to climate change(s): years of unusual and severe weather patterns; large cloud masses that block sunlight/blanket the surface; extreme temperature drops, deforestation and eventual blight. These after-effects push the last vestiges of national unity over the cliff, leaving regions and other domains to disengage, balkanize¹⁴⁰, and otherwise attempt to go out on their own—whoever “their own” happens to be.

All of that described thus far is much more detrimental than what could have occurred with further external force; for what develops is something analogous to a cancer or infection—incrementally destroying all life and limb, function

¹³⁹ *The Road* is a 2009 film that is a post-apocalyptic tale of a man and his son trying to survive by any means possible; it was adapted from the Pulitzer Prize-winning 2006 novel of the same name by American author Cormac McCarthy.

¹⁴⁰ Balkanize: the process of fragmentation or division of a region or state into smaller regions.

and structure.¹⁴¹ But as to how this all began, prior to the first-strike, is more akin to an attitude; something on scale with the Greek's hubris played-out in the ethos of empire.

Hubris calls for nemesis, and in one form or another it's going to get it, not as a punishment from outside but as the completion of a pattern already started.¹⁴²

In the ensuing years, more death and desolation occurs by a multitude of minor and major events, natural and/or manmade. Among these is at least one originating in the cosmos that triggers a massive tidal surge in the "great waters" to the East. For those who had somehow survived along the seaboard and gulf, the surge is/was the final blow, re-establishing shorelines hundreds of kilometers inland and forcing further migration for those who last the flood.

As to the alliance and other lands to the East, the plans for one-world order remain in the course of continuous conflict and unprecedented powers. And the West is, at some level, still engaged in these plans. Those who had prepared/survived the EVE have emerged as integrated, secured, subterranean structures generally referred to as METROPOLIS or simply "METRO".

¹⁴¹ This statement suggests *divide and conquer* as the course to undermine strength, acquire power, rather than by foreign invasion-offensives.

¹⁴² Mary Midgley, *The Myths We Live By*.

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METRO is engaged in the struggle with the alliance of the East/Far East. This network crosses regions with and beyond the landmass, and has extensions of the maturing ministry, mercantilism and military (mentioned previously). Existence within METRO is highly technological, predominately proletariat, and purposely programmatic. Network travel is excluded to elevated shuttles and, for the few, air travel. Connectively to other landmasses is occasionally disrupted; communications and information is continuous—to the extent that it guides every word, thought and action.

These closed populations are generally not aware or attentive to existence beyond the network; thus, there is no desire to venture or explore to that considered as outlying areas. Such awareness, attention and action occur largely through random and roving surveillance, a system called “MATI”.

METRO is governed by a global legal system, as the alliance, called “POLITIC”. In the “struggle” for one-world order, POLITIC plays a key role in the plan to centralize ministry, mercantilism and the military—the governing and unifying of all the so-called “Free World”. Yet POLITIC is like any other law of any other time and place; it is:

Made by very mortal people—very limited people, very opinionated people, and people that have very special interests. They make the law; they tell us what the law is...; and then they act as if it's Holy rite.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Howard Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*.

IN THE LESSENING

Likewise, the centralization of these authorities lends not to the discipline and adherence of the rule of law, but rather, increased lawlessness and corruption on a global scale. It is almost ironic that such intellectual and organizational capacity would attempt what has never been accomplished heretofore.

It is the mark of the mind untrained to take its own processes as valid for all men, and its own judgments for absolute truth.¹⁴⁴

Last and perhaps least is COMMUNITY; a relatively small population of outliers in this region that have somehow survived all that is described on the Eve of THE LESSENING. Loosely and primitively organized, this hodgepodge of nomadic, agrarian persons access both natural and supernatural sources in determination that goes beyond mere existence to something in the way of life and living. And it has worked, to their amazement, as:

Human beings seem to be wired for community...Why do people often look back on their college days as the best years of their life? It is the fact that they lived more closely in a community than ever before or since.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Aleister Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries on The Book of the Law*.

¹⁴⁵ Bill McKibbern, *Deep Economy*.

IN THE LESSENING

OF A(N)/THE

STORY (telling)

SYSTEM (lessening)

SHUTTLE (transporting)

SHANTY (housing)

GROUND (moving)

NATURE (eating)

ANIMALS (working)

RUNNERS (communicating)

WISDOM (understanding)

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FALSE (flagging)

WEB (attaching)

FORCES (enslaving)

CARE (sharing)

LOVE (loving)

FEAR (turning)

WAY (making)

IN THE LESSENING

SEED (flowering)

NATURE (healing)

BOND (forming)

BOMB (destroying)

NEWS (validating)

PAIN (releaving)

MOON (lighting)

WORD (waiting)

FACE (choosing)

SHELL (gaming)

SHOW (timing)

POINT (harpping)

DEBT (strapping)

FACT (questioning)

CHOICE (making)

HARD (working)

MONEY (making)

WISE (cracking)

LESSON (learning)

CHILD (playing)

POT (melting)

DEAD (dwelling)

IN THE LESSENING

RIGHT (fighting)

STRONG (arming)

SONG (sharing)

CHESS (playing)

CLOUD (watching)

ROME (remembering)

SUN (raining)

STRENGTH (growing)

FAR (outing)

START (coming)

FORE (telling)

LIFE (enriching)

PEACE (loving)



STORY (telling)

The story has been around since for the ages, thanks to storytelling.

As communication is touted as the most important key to leadership, it is likewise the most important key to understanding and learning. Clear communication requires context and feedback; for without knowing where you are or where you've been, you cannot know where you're going.



It is the telling and retelling (of a story) that has been essential for community; otherwise, life and living are unbearable.

From Sue Monk Kidd from *The Secret Life of Bees*:
"Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here."

SYSTEM (lessening)

THE LESSENING was characterized as the consequences of one or more systems' failures or breakdown(s).

From Wikipedia, "Social Collapse" is described:

Societal collapse broadly includes both quite abrupt societal failures typified by collapses (such as that of the Mayan Civilization), as well as more extended gradual declines of superpowers (like the Roman Empire).

Concurrent with these breakdowns was series of crisis or catastrophes of manmade and natural cause.



Richard I. Cook, MD; Cognitive technologies Laboratory University of Chicago; "Why Complex Systems Fail":

Catastrophe requires multiple failures—single point failures are not enough.[] Overt catastrophic failure occurs when small, apparently innocuous failures join to create opportunity for a systemic accident. Each of these small failures is necessary to cause catastrophe but only the combination is sufficient to permit failure.

SHUTTLE (transporting)

This is a high-speed vessel similar to what currently exist as public transportation in Europe and parts of Asia.

METROPOLIS (or the general name for urban centers) maintains networks of shuttles as the singular transportation for public use. Air transportation is for MATI (the eyes of POLITIC) use, only.



COMMUNITY is relegated to travel on foot to include running as conducted in ancient civilizations such as Greece. Beasts of burden were destroyed IN THE LESSENING.

From Ben Okri, poet, novelist: “The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering.”

SHANTY (housing)

A shanty is “choice” housing for community life. Constructed from natural and man-made materials, it is a work-in-process; temporary quarters given the length of stay and availability of resources.

Everyone should have a shanty. Still, compromises are made to accommodate everyone, but nothing equates to the creature-comforts of conventional housing.



Communities are somewhat nomadic or transitory (similar to the some Native- American tribes). Resources as well as risks represent the reasons or causes for relocating, even escaping, from the likes of POLITIC.

From George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950); playwright, Nobel winner:

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live.

GROUND (moving)

Movements or ventures, whether teams or the entire village, have been perfected using military-style techniques: terrain and camouflage are used, along with different formations depending on the mission.

In this particular event, a rescue team must be “fast and furious” in reaching the shuttle accident and recovering as many survivors as possible, practical.



Detection or confrontations (potential dangers) must be avoided—if that is possible—thus leading and lending to much discipline and development in the way of technique and tools.

From Jesse Owens (1913-1980), Olympic athlete:

We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams come into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort.

NATURE (eating)

Out of necessity, nature has become *second-nature* to the community.

As a somewhat nomadic people, COMMUNITY must be even more intense in applying the techniques of planting, harvest, and preservation; as well as living off the land—it's basic and producible offering.



Practices of the past, that essentially eradicated natural resources, has served as both lessens and limitations.

Still, the much larger segments of the population (METRO) have retained or regressed to such practices proven to fail in the long run.

Ralph Waldo Emerson advised: “Adopt the pace of nature; her secret is patience.”

ANIMALS (working)

Continuing with subjects of nature, animal life has been greatly altered in terms of practical use such as livestock.

Memories of horses are just that; for the horse is among those destroyed through a combination of man-made and natural causes.



Needless to say, the horse would be highly prized in agrarian setting like COMMUNITY. As is it, everyone has to kick-in and, at times, make like a horse.

From Ross Parmenter, an anthropologist: “My belief is that personal freedom cannot grow beyond personal responsibility.”

RUNNERS (communicating)

As in ancient Greece, “marathon” runners developed as a primary if not only means of long-distance communications.

Besides the effort of running long-distance, runners must be artful and skilled at evading detection; or otherwise, being intercepted by MATI. Usually traveling alone, they are dependent entirely upon their own abilities, ingenuity and basic instincts for survival. Add to these individual skills and instincts a network of paths or tracks for relays and extended routes to communicate and integrate across communities.



From Ludwig Von Mises:

Society is joint action and cooperation in which each participant sees the other partner's success as a means for the attainment of his own.

WISDOM (understanding)

From experiences come information, then knowledge, then application and wisdom where possible. With such progression is an ever deeper understanding of the way things are and could be.

The dreamer can be dangerous; for to dream too much or too deeply is to remove the mind from the daily decorum and its duty. But to mentally move (beyond) is not necessarily by will or want; but it is more a combination of the inexplicable, intricate actions of mind, heart and soul.



From George Elliot, novelist, editor:

What greater thing is there for human souls than to feel that they are joined for life—to be with each other in silent unspeakable memories?

CAMOUFLAGE (hiding)

Camouflage has been around for the ages; it is the perception over reality. In the outback is the perfect backdrop for camouflage.

Hiding from MATI (the eyes) may entail an animal-like appearance, even such erratic behavior—anything with the potential to evoke confusion, evade detection, and live for another day.



From southern novelist-writer William Faulkner:

I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.

MIND (thinking)

Community is not only physically at risks, but also mentally—as with individual thoughts or thinking.

Mind-control is the means by which so many have been enslaved; brought to submission via a system: POLITIC performing in flawless form as a supreme authority; MATI with constant feeds of synthesized data that ensure nothing slips by.



There is: what we know or what we believe to be certain, what we think we know or what we want to believe..., and what we don't know. In mind-control however, such is lost as the mind goes amiss.

From Plutarch (46-127), Historian, Writer: "A mind is a fire to be kindled, not a vessel to be filled."

DOUBTS (questioning)

Doubts (or doubting) never die; no matter how much we think about it, discuss it, or learn from it.

It is impossible to know the future or the consequences of some event or decision; even so, second-guessing arrives to give reality to doubts or doubting. Such thinking in retrospect does not change the outcome, of course; but some reflection does allow for the possibility of learning, growing, etc.



From Zen: “The three qualities necessary for training: great faith, great doubt, [and] great effort.”

IMAGINATION (dreaming)

Just as we all have doubts, we all have dreams: some dreams may be fantasies to fulfill our desires, good or bad; other dreams may be nightmarish or otherwise, inexplicable or bizarre.

But records show that imagination and dreaming can be powerful and profound. Great figures in history were said or believed to have dreamt dreams (or saw visions) foretelling of significant and critical future causes and outcomes.

Prophecy remains as the possibility if not proven certainty of things to come.



The imagination and dreaming is a great asset or gift; and as said by Anatole France, a critic and writer (1844-1924): “To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.”

DISPATCHES (informing)

Dispatches are the single source of information-communication between community; hence, the criticality of the runner, their survival and stealthy passage.

But like any communications, failure or errors can occur, thus reducing the benefit or value of the information...and subsequent actions.



As to action, its role; even doing nothing is still doing something, so the better the information, the better the action. Action is the word; and as said by Hugh Prather; author, counselor, minister:

To live for results would be to sentence myself to continuous frustration. My only sure reward is in my actions and not from them.

AWARENESS (awakening)

The mind can have great and terrible thoughts; but then again, the mind can just sleep so as to leave the heart completely alone, more vulnerable, to face the world.

To be awakened (from a mental slumber) is to be ready and responsible; to plan for the worst, but to hope for the best. It is a process, the state of being awakened; it begins with the certainty that things are not always as they appear or are even perceived.



Alex Tan, political activist:

Perhaps our eyes need to be washed by our tears once in a while, so that we can see life with a clearer view again.

DEATH (passing)

For COMMUNITY, death is a way of life—and to life!

Oh, but first comes death: nothing is more certain than death and nothing more uncertain than its arrival; yet, whether measured in moments or the length of years, physical life is no more.

But just before death is the last gasp, the final breath; and so ends, not just a life, but the struggle to survive and the fear of death.



Until death however, there is Job's certainty that *man is born into trouble as surely as sparks fly upward from the fire.*

Thomas Paine; scholar, intellectual, writer:

I love the man that can smile in trouble; [and]
that can gather strength from distress, and grow
brave by reflection.

COLISEUM (entertaining)

Entertainment is nothing in community as was common in unimaginable spectacle and scale before THE LESSENING; eventually and inevitably, entertainment surpassed everything as hedonism.

They were warned of overindulging; the more you have, the more you want. But they did not listen; they did not accept the message or warning that such pursuits, of no limits or boundaries, could not go on.



They embraced the fatalism that that the best you can do with your life is have a good time and get by the best you can. Yet, it's all smoke, nothing but smoke.

For nothing offers more fulfillment than working at loving, says Ken Essien: "The highest vocation we can have is Love. Love in action is service."

STRENGTH (sensing)

The source of strength is vital to survival; and here, at the moment of engagement is where “the team” must test their mettle, their strength and senses.

It is the presence of peace (in such circumstances) that is strength: not the counterfeit of foolish bliss or devil-may-care; but the real deal that weighs the risks and the reward—even at the certainty of great personal costs!



From Saint Francis de Sales: “Nothing is so strong as gentleness. Nothing is so gentle as real strength.”

SACRIFICE (beating)

To be beaten for doing wrong is one thing; but to be beaten for sport is another.

When one is punished for doing wrong, than they are possibly getting what they deserve—or what they have brought on themselves. But when one is punished for the pleasing of others—for nothing done wrong—they are enduring, standing and even sacrificing for good.



From Edmund Burke; statesman, author, and philosopher:

When bad men combine, the good must associate;
else they will fall, one by one, an un-pitied
sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.

SPACE (enlightening)

Space provides signs. This celestial matter really matter: the cycles that signal the season, the appearance and position relative to this region; and all other details discovered through the ingenuity and insight that extend to the furthest point in place and time.



The wonder and attention of a child met by the musing of his elder: the possibility that a shooting star is the sorrow of an ever growing hate. Still, the wonder and still, a child will lead them.

From Wayne Muller; author, therapist, minister:
Within sorrow is grace. When we come close to those things that break us down, we touch those things that also break us open. And in that breaking open, we uncover our true nature.

TEARS (struggling)

What comes to mind in this combination of tears and struggle is the “Trail of Tears”: the name given to the forced relocation and movement of Native American nations from southeastern parts of the United States following the Indian Removal Act of 1830 (Wikipedia; Trail of Tears).

What it must have been like; to leave loved ones behind, or still, to see them die defending these lands for which they understood as justifiably-owned by no man.



From “Lone Man” (Isna-la-wica), Teton Sioux: “I have seen that in any great undertaking it is not enough for a man to depend simply upon himself.”

GOOD (righting)

Good (or right), cannot always be clearly identified, understood or applied; for what is truly good can be twisted to seem bad and vice versa. POLITIC (the law) can never ensure good or right; power is always prone to corruption.

Where then is the source of good and right? It is in THE LIGHT; a pure and powerful force for which there is no substitute, no superior, THE LIGHT illuminates to both learn and to love, the heart in harmony with the mind.



From William James (1842-1910); psychologist, philosopher, and author:

We forget that every good that is worth possessing must be paid for in strokes of daily effort. We postpone and postpone, until those smiling possibilities are dead.

GIFT (sharing)

As so often considered in gift giving; it is not the price, but rather, the heart that matters. In this particular exchange of a simple horse figurine, the heart is at work creating sentimental value.

COMMUNITY does not obviously have the means to acquire much at all—and certainly not gifts of great expense. But in terms of giving, these hearts have done their duty; they seem to share most everything—even their own safety and security. And though exceptions are always natural, sharing has proven to be as important as caring when it comes to COMMUNITY.



From W. Clement Stone: “If you are really thankful, what do you do? You share.”

SELF (reflecting)

Self-reflection is not suggested as a cure-all for the deep and complex behaviors of Narcissism and its cousins. But what is possible, on reflection, is to begin to understand who we each are...and are not.

COMMUNITY is an assortment of backgrounds and behaviors; individuals that have come from conditions and circumstances that would be too deep and disturbing to describe here, if at all. Suffice to say that their arrival to this place is certainly not the end of their problems but, quite possibly, could be the beginning—as they go about acclimating and adjusting to life and living in difficult, even impossible, conditions.



From Søren Kierkegaard: “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”

MIND (detaining)

Though condemned for life in the dreaded Château d'If, the young Edmond Dantès (*Count of Monte Cristo*) eventually escapes. Edmond's life of humble beginnings is radically changed in a complex plot of loyalty, betrayal and revenge.

The similarity (to Simon) is life imprisonment as an enemy of the state, accused of sedition or treason. Beyond this cause, their journeys differ however; as Edmond sought revenge while Simon, seemingly a solitary life of contemplation and reconciliation, as possible.



From Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*; a toast given by Edmond to his son (unbeknownst at the time):

Life is a storm, my young friend. You will bask in the sunlight one moment, be shattered on the rocks the next. What makes you a man is what you do when that storm comes. You must look into that storm and shout as you did in Rome. "Do your worst, for I will do mine!" Then the fates will know you as we know you.

FORCE (controlling)

Control is not the end, and nor force the means, for COMMUNITY; but to draw contrast or distinction, such means and ends are compared with the condition of groups, states other institutions—past and present. Of course, COMMUNITY is **not** removed from this condition.



The similarity of personal or public control is the presence and projection of fear—either real and/or manufactured. Yes, both individuals and institutions can (and do) use fear to deceive, manipulate and control.

From Michael Crichton, *State of Fear*: “Social control is best managed through fear.”

BLIND (seeing)

The transformation of Simon, post-imprisonment, is perhaps no more apparent than now; to befriend a person that he suspects an agent for METRO.



The thought might be that, so close to death himself, Simon is really not taking a risk. But in actually, he was...by aiding someone who was a potential risk to the rescue team and, in turn, COMMUNITY.

His actions are not only representative of his virtue but COMMUNITY—as they accept Nark in spite of such risks.

From Tennessee Williams: “Hell is [you] and the only redemption is when a person puts himself aside to feel deeply for another person.”

WAR (conflicting)

Conflict (or warring) is conducted in degrees, from the internal strife of a heart, to that of global proportions.

COMMUNITY does not want conflict, and goes to great effort to avoid it or, as a last resort, to confront it. And knowing how to do it is just as important as knowing when.... But no matter the planning or conditioning, the costs are always there; and sometimes, in the loss of loved ones so as to prolong the pains.



From John Steinbeck: "All war is a symptom of man's failure as a thinking animal."

MUSIC (singing)

Music or song is one of the consolations of COMMUNITY. Children and adults alike are encouraged to sing from the routine (work, a gathering) to special events (celebration, last rites).

Music and song are performed with few if any instruments, lending to the importance and quality of voice and harmony. To hear such sounds would be similar to church services that have carried-on a cappella music of long ago.

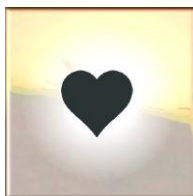


From Bob Marley: "One good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain."

HEART (failing)

The heart can fail, physically and/or actionably (in the matter of individual choices and decisions). Even good intentions do **not** always lend to good or desirable outcomes.

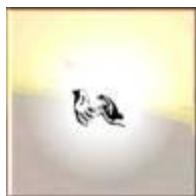
Long ago, Blaise Pascal said: “the heart has its reasons, which reason does not know”. Some sources suggest that the heart is therefore subject to more (or something more) than simply reason: the person (their heart) will choose to believe (something or someone)—even when it seems unreasonable or irrational; the heart and the mind do not always agree, if they even get along.



Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586); poet, soldier: “It is the nature of the strong heart, that like the palm tree it strives ever upwards when it is most burdened.”

HAND (helping)

A continuation of Simon's display of heart, a helping hand is just what this young person needs (whether he realizes it or not). But the "helping hand" is symbolic of guiding one in a direction of true benefit—which is something very new and different for this young person, so adrift in the moment.



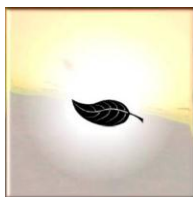
The helping hand can come through multiple hearts (influences) that can create misdirection and confusion—which is why a one-on-one is so effective.

From James Buckham, writer, author: "Trials, temptations, disappointments—all these are helps instead of hindrances, if one uses them rightly."

FOOD (nourishing)

The necessities for sustaining human life (shelter, food and water) are a prevailing concern-condition for COMMUNITY.

The contrast of COMMUNITY and METRO occurs on several levels. One is in the production-provision of food: for COMMUNITY, even essentials can be a scarcity; while for METRO, it is somewhat systematic (as in the present supply chain that most of us are part of). This one contrasting area has an enormous effect on life and living.



F. Scott Fitzgerald, novelist, screenwriter: “One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.”

LIFE (sucking)

The title takes-on several possible meanings; one of which is along the lines that “life sucks”.

Here however, the title suggests a condition-character that sucks the life out of...so that such influence, whether present or not, produces the proverbial “back cloud” over the otherwise sunny day (or, as illustrated, leaves nothing but the bones for anyone else).



“Nark” (an abbreviation of Narcissism) expands the title, its intended meaning to METRO; that when a relatively few exert power over the many (their life and living) nothing is left but the bones.

Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*:

The self-indulgent man craves for all pleasant things, and is led by his appetite to choose these at the cost of everything else.

RAT (stinking)

This subject is rooted in the suspension that something is not as it seems; that is, that evil is lurking amid an otherwise acceptable situation.

Bart has good reason to be cautious and, at the least, an excuse to refuse the role of watchman (of Nark). But it is more suspicion (and not actual experience as an agent of METRO) that is behind the reason or excuse.



And while the effort to save Nark (or Ark) is lastly embraced, Bart feels it right and necessary to express his feelings regarding the risks. Such opportunity or liberty is scarce in METRO.

From Eric Hoffer:

The suspicious mind believes more than it doubts. It believes in a formidable and ineradicable evil lurking in every person.

BLOOM (revealing)

A bloom (or blooming) is beautiful in its splendor (of sight and smell) and, though alluring, it can be risky to the touch as often described in the rose, its thorns.

The floral of nature is fascinating, from seed to pollination and the processes that occur with and by such creations. In the association to human behavior is the beauty that results in (and leads to) the process of working-through the past (facing the reality of prior pain)—not just to benefit the one, but also for others too.



From James Bryant Conant:

Behavior which appears superficially correct but is intrinsically corrupt always irritates those who see below the surface.

But in the struggle, where the fear of “blooming” begins to subside, is the revealing of truth or reality—a far better and beautiful experience than living the illusion that all will be ameliorated through reconciliation.

From Janette Rallison, *My Double Life*:

...and her dreams that didn't happen, that couldn't have happened because she'd pinned them on somebody too broken and unattainable to love her back.

PEACE (suffering)

Can peace be found on earth?

It was Helen Keller who said: “all the world is full of suffering”, but then followed it with: “It is also full of overcoming.”



And overcoming could certainly describe what COMMUNITY has attempted to do, or is doing. The “doing” is not by force or through conflict, but is attempted in the most risky, but redeemable way; with love expressed in the actions of giving and sharing—supporting one to the other.

From Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*:
“What is hell? I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love.”

FALSE (flagging)

A term that seems to have gained notoriety, “False Flag”, is about manufacturing a crisis in order to sway public or popular support for some cause.

Continuing (on) with this deception, metro seemingly has used the shuttle explosion for similar reasons (though the reader may never know the full story, as typical in actual history).



As to the consequences however, no sentiment could be more fitting than that of Walter Scott who said: “Oh, what a tangled web we weave...when first we practice to deceive.”

From Mark Twain, “The Mysterious Stranger” (1910):

The statesmen will invent cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities...he will by and by convince himself that the war is just....

WEB (attaching)

Several meanings for “web”, but the basic premise: an interlocking/integrated, sometimes-symmetric, multi-connection string of something or another; strength is enhanced when individual things come together.



This basic premise described, consider Charlotte’s Web; the benefit of a web, if just to serve from merely observation-fascination (if not participation).

From E.B. White:

You have been my friend. That in itself is a tremendous thing. I wove my webs for you because I liked you. After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die. A spider's life can't help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies. By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that.

FORCES (enslaving)

Forces come in several forms. In general, these forms can be physical and violent but may also be subtle and silent. In more detail, the forms are:

Displaced: to force from the familiar-favorable.

Degraded: to force from status-stature.

Demoted: to force from place-position.

Dismembered: to force from point-person.

Demoralized: to force from good-gratitude.

Disregarded: to force from care-concern.

Deceived: to force from truth-telling.

Distracted: to force from awareness-attention.

Drugged: to force from coherence-conscience.

Decoy: to force from justice-jury.

Dissect: to force from community-connection.

Dependence: to force from freedom-fellowship.



From David Hawkins, M.D. PhD:

Force is incomplete and therefore has to be fed energy constantly. Power is total and complete in itself and requires nothing from outside.

CARE (sharing)

This topic has been touched-on before; caring and sharing (as actions common to community) are the substance of the web; it is what draws one to other both within and, some degree, throughout the network of community.

Is there ever division or strife?
Of course; as even two, bound in the deepest love, are going to have their problems between them and within them.



But caring and sharing is not about perfection or some grand plan; it is about creating hope beginning with one and continuing with others so that many can be closer to one.

William Arthur Ward, author, educator, speaker:

Do more than belong: participate. Do more than care: help. Do more than believe: practice. Do more than be fair: be kind. Do more than forgive: forget. Do more than dream: work.

LOVE (loving)

What we all want, what we each need—even if means that we are the only one who is able, willing.

What is love, loving? It is something that matters most, or should; it is what makes COMMUNITY possible. Love and loving is a force; a very powerful force. It is not self-infatuation, but it is self-awareness, self-appreciation; thus, the appeal to “love yourself” by Ben.



Rainer Maria Rilke:

Once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue, a wonderful living side by side can grow, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole against the sky.

FEAR (turning)

Fear is described and referenced throughout the story; stemming from the person to the place and time, it is a condition that much be managed—if that is possible.



To use another example from nature (as the turtle was used to describe risk-taking), the rabbit seems a fretful lot; but fear can bring it to dead stillness as a defense mechanism. Fear can be a force for good.

But than relief (from fear) comes as another positive outcome; such as in the story when the rouges no longer seem a real threat (the storm is over, the coast is clear, and we have reached the shore), a turning from fear to some sense of freedom.

From Benjamin Disraeli: “Fear makes us feel our humanity.”

WAY (making)

The word “way” is used repeatedly to distinguish a method or means for taking action: there is the practice of community to follow THE WAY (more a standard for life and living) and then there are alternatives....



THE WAY is mystical or supernatural; a prevailing source of energy that lends to what is basically described as *doing the right thing* or *living right*—not according to metro or prevailing law (Politic); but in the origin, order and organization of creation.

The association to the coast (here) has to with Wes, both his birthplace and his present destination. He believes that THE WAY is leading him back to the coast for reasons that pertain to his natural family.

From Henry David Thoreau: “However mean your life is, meet it and live it.”

SEED (blooming)

This is another association of a natural process, from seed to bloom, of personal growth and revelation: the flowering that is not be confused with physical maturity, but with more the emotional....



In the splendor of romance, Abby is beginning to bloom; she is beginning to lay aside past experiences that have burdened her to such degree so as to be a permanent bud unable or unwilling to bloom again—keeping her from exposing her beauty.

From Ritu Ghatourey:

When we are in a truly loving relationship, we receive the gift of being known and accepted. We become more, not less, of who we are. We receive the space in which to bloom. This is how we know we are in a loving relationship. We are blooming, and the one we love is blooming as well.

NATURE (healing)

While the controversy of “global warming” continues, what should be certain is that nature has endured relatively more adversity and abuse in the modern world. The depletion of non-renewable resources, that is beyond debate, lends to the question of whether that which can (or will) be consumed-destroyed can be recovered or restored?

The forces of nature, to the endless supernatural, might be the only means by which the question is addressed: if those (of us) who have failed as good stewards have no intention of (or desire for) renewal, than maybe the supernatural (forces) are the only possibility, the only hope.



From the Bible, 2 Chronicles 7:14 ESV:

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

BOND (forming)

A bond has several meanings; but here, the meaning is that which draws and links things together; as in magnetism, where opposite poles are attracted to each other.



A bond can begin with a mild attraction, a curiosity or likeness; and in that of friendship or courtship, an excitement that is elicited even without the possibility of seeing the other, but just hearing their voice or the mention of their name. It is a wonderful aspect of life and living, this forming of a bond, but it is not easy; forming bond has many positives but not without pains.

From Saint Augustine:

What I needed most was to love and to be loved, eager to be caught. Happily I wrapped those painful bonds around me; and sure enough, I would be lashed with the red-hot pokers or jealousy, by suspicions and fear, by burst of anger and quarrels.

BOMB (destroying)

Nuclear contamination (whether from energy sources or through warfare) is a real and present danger. This danger occurs not only in the immediate effect but also in the extended health issues previously observed and understood.



As Wes prepares to return (to the coast), Matt describes such a nuclear catastrophe; one that occurred, essentially destroying major urban centers, the locations of great military strength in and beyond the region. And though his adventure is beyond the affected locations, the possibility remains-exists for related risks.

From Colon Powell:

Today I can declare my hope and declare it from the bottom of my heart that we will eventually see the time when that number of nuclear weapons is down to zero and the world is a much better place.

NEWS (validating)

The mode of media (information, data, etc.) has been greatly reduced for COMMUNITY; validating news (via dispatch) and vetting the sources is a challenge.



What do you do (or what would you do)? Community is perhaps grateful (as in all things) that they do not have to contend with the complexities of the once-information age. But, even so; could the problem still be power? After all, information is power.

A simple(r) example of this relationship is between two people; the one who abuses trust (of the other) in purposely communicating misinformation (as an act of fraud). So the other, the victim of abused trust, accepts the information unsuspecting of either the error of information or, more importantly, the abuse of trust.

From Elias Canetti:

Adults find pleasure in deceiving a child. They consider it necessary, but they also enjoy it. The children very quickly figure it out and then practice deception themselves.

PAIN (releaving)

Saint Augustine said, “The greatest evil is physical pain.” And anyone (or most everyone) who has ever endured some intense, physical pain has an understanding that—at the moment—nothing else matters.



Enter either the age of modern medicine, or for community, the return to natural sources such as cannabis. But as with all pain-killers, the benefit can (or does) enter into the arena of abuse.

In the theme of community could be the notion that drugs, natural or otherwise, would not be necessary, if available; but this notion would have to practically deny all of history where humankind seeks a better life—whether a momentary release from physical pain if just to try to stave-off more complications.

From Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*: “When you've suffered a great deal in life, each additional pain is both unbearable and trifling.”

MOON (lighting)

The moon has its magic; as one of my favorite films *Moonstruck*: “the moon brings the woman to the man.”

To add to the encounter is the pasture; that like a garden, it presents a romantic setting awaiting these two lovers.



Each is awakened, or perhaps just jostled from their bedding; each prompted to walk to the same place and the same time—neither knowing nor necessarily caring what the other is doing. Is it magic; that moon, that beautiful moon that brought them together? Their senses and sensations are heightened in the approach; each has reached a state of near bliss with only one thing missing: each other.

From J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*:
“Moonlight drowns out all but the brightest stars.”

WORD (waiting)

Bart waits for his lover, Abby; and though insecure in his ability to express himself in words, shows in his patience the love that has blossomed in their relationship.

As to why he waits; well, the intense questioning brings him to some sense of this deep feelings both for her and in his own inability. He is not aware of any prior relations of this kind; this is all new to him: life and living, and love.



Still, he loves to be in love—as with life and living—and is a romantic in heart with a penchant for poetic verse.

From Robert Frost: “We ran as to meet the moon.”

FACE (choosing)

Abby is unsure; but more, she is shaking, or afraid. Her losses have been too many, too much to avoid “darkness”. She has known these conditions for practically all her years—that which she can—or chooses—to remember.

Life and living lifted her out of this darkness; it introduced THE LIGHT to help her see through prevailing darkness. Now, as she is able and willing to let go of her shaking, she is further lifted in love.



The two faces that she bares are that of dread, the darkness and her shaking, and desire for the love she has found. This is a new time and place for her; yet she struggle with the sense that something similar existed before, but was lost seemingly forever.

From Khalil Gibran: “We are all like the bright moon; we still have our darker side.”

SHELL (gaming)

The old shell game, the slight of hand, the trick of plan; for which you might find that what you thought was true is not true at all. Call it a cover-up or a conspiracy; but there's more than meets the eye.

Why play; why even engage in the game?
Because you like a challenge, the risks;
but then, you do even realize what's going
on beyond odds perhaps?



In his travels to the coastline, Wes is confronted with POLITIC; not the actual institution, but the instruction acquired through his association with Cal and COMMUNITY. What he remembers—and will never forget—is that POLITIC is an imposter; posing as the savior when actually the Caesar—or was it the seizure?

From U.S. Senator John Kerry: “We're in a battle for our lives for things that really matter to us. There's a shell game going on like I've never seen before.”

SHOW (timing)

Step right up; see the state perform all manner of magical acts. Yes you, you there; are you ready for the thrill of a lifetime. Get you ticket while you still can.

And so goes the sale; the hook, the hollow words and everything else used to convince you of its truth.



Not only must this show go on, but it must never end. Unless of course that you decide to forgo the show, the ticket; or, in the chance we went before, you may say, "Hey, it's not worth; you're wasting you time." But this is not easy; make such remarks and you find magical acts being played on your head as run, not walk, away.

From Rumpelstiltskin, "Once Upon a Time": "All magic comes with a price."

POINT (harping)

Sal continues the discourse on POLITIC; but unlike Ban and Wes, he is doing it directly with the great master, Cal.

Cal is conditioned in such matters; he knows what he's talking about; what he has been saying for some time, hoping that others would listen—just like his mentor, Simon. Sure, he may repeat himself, but the point needs to be made, the importance emphasized, the delivery effective.



Repeating a thing does not make it right; it only makes it believable—which is where public relations enter the stage. Yes, repetition has a way of making the unthinkable not on believable, but doable—with or without reservations.

From Noam Chomsky:

The process of shaping opinion, attitudes, and perceptions was termed the 'engineering of consent' by one of the founders of the modern public-relations industry, Edward Bernays.

DEBT (strapping)

Cal continues on course in the realm of POLITIC; this time the subject is revolution, monetary style, where no applicant or beneficiary can be turned down or declined—the opportunity is rife for reform.

Debt is the destroyer; it is the means by which these applicants are undermined: thinking that borrowing is the solution, when in fact, it is surrender of sovereignty—a loss that seemingly is unredeemable. And who but the combination of politics and business could mastermind such a means of revolution; one that works peacefully by comparison to the more conventional, aggressive forms of revolution, yet is similarly powerful in seizing power.



From Ambrose Bierce: “Debt, n. an ingenious substitute for the chain and whip of the slave-driver.”

FACT (questioning)

In the final comments on the realm of POLITIC; Cal and Arc share their personal views of truth and lies. In the conversation, Arc is enlightened on the ill-effects; a lesson that could have prevented much pain, though certainly allowed for much pleasure.



Arc is on a journey of learning. He is learning about METRO and related history through Cal's documents and Mat's mentoring. Questioning everything is labor intensive but learning-questioning even the so-called facts against his assumptions.

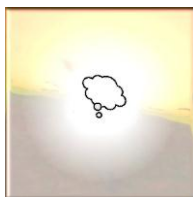
Why bother with all this learning; after all, there are easier, more convenient ways to live? Maybe, but the truth is that humans are built to learn and to reason; it is as natural as breathing and equally vital to life and living.

From W. B. Yeats: "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

CHOICE (making)

Again, we are not the master of our destiny; we make choices and there are consequences, but as to the connection, that is not easy to ascertain.

Power does get in the way; in the collection of opposing forces, unclear thinking and foolish choices are not avoidable, as Arc is reminded.



His own prior choices are being revisited and, ideally, will serve him well—providing much needed lessons for life and living. Arc is not alone in this; he is not an island or rock, as much as he might want to believe. His journey may involve many rocks; those that shatter our dreams, that sink our boat. But what is important is that he no longer fears the one thing he dreaded most; being all alone, without anyone.

From Rick Riordan, *The Throne of Fire*: “The right choice is hardly ever the easy choice.”

HARD (working)

It is hard work; making the right choices. We grabble with the options, delay our decisions, possibly seek advice and then go for it. And still the results fall short of our expectations. What to do?

In our losses, our defeats are disappointments; and as the preceding decisions, such outcomes cannot be avoided; the disappointment, despair and even death—all of which we must deal with. How to do it?

I will forget the title of this particular text book only because it seemed so out of place; a technical book entitled: “Making Hard Decisions”. Somewhat misleading, the difficulty was more in the determination—the problem solving methods—than the final decision. You see, the analytics or calculations was carried most of the weight, as opposed to intuition or gut feeling.



From Ernest Hemingway: “It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.”

IN THE LESSENING

MONEY (making)

Money is what makes the earth revolve, right? Or least it keeps us all continuously running in the treadmill until, well, we run out.

Once again money makes it way to the list of ills that prompted THE LESSENING; not just money, but the greed that magically gives it value. Combine this greed with government and what you have is the pinnacle of power and possession; the dynamic dual of the dollar.



Wealth may be good, but the pursuit of wealth can breed a lot of bad.

From John Steinbeck:

It has always seemed strange to me... the things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling, are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest, are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second.

BOAT (floating)

What is the expression: whatever floats your boat?

Here, Cal and Sal continue their conversation on state; this time, the subject of corruption and its consequences. Conveniently, they apply a metaphor of a ship; but not just any ship, but The Love Boat.

The love boat is no ordinary vessel; it operates like family should; with a vital amount of wind to keep her moving and a sharp and sound mind at her helm.

Sure the storms to come and, worse case, she may be sink—the crew lost. But love is a powerful force; it has a way of weathering such storms even if the crew should perish, the ship is lost.



So raise the anchor and lower the mast; and be of good cheer thee Van Morrison. “Now hear the sailors cry, smell the sea, and feel the sky...let your soul & spirit fly, into the mystic...”

WISE (cracking)

A similar term of era, “wisecracking” is defined as a flippant, typically sardonic remark or retort.

Now, with that out of the way, let’s move on to the matter at hand: serving somebody and, in turn, being a Sensai of sort, like Ben.

With a penchant for learning, Ben is clearly deserving of his new found title in training, leading. At the same however, he suffers some degree of insecurity often shielded behind his endless effort to educate others.



Over and above his effort, plying his skills, Ben is gifted with dreaming; revelations that arise through THE LIGHT while providing a mystic lens into the future. These dreams offer great advantage for COMMUNITY, often delivering advanced information instrumental to their very survival.

From Edgar Allen Poe:

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there, wondering, fearing, doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.

LESSON (learning)

The lessons continue for both adult and child alike. COMMUNITY is a virtual learning center.

Not that the lessons are always planned; as Arc has begun to casually cover COMMUNITY with something called Hip-words that seem to coincide with a lifestyle coincidental with the commune.



Still, the newly sanctioned Sensai is hard at work educating those who will tolerate his tutelage—though most seem to be stifling in the dense air of stress caused by the coming storm, the impending relocation to higher ground.

His troubling dream, the meaning now revealed, is the talk of the town; and even Arc is aware though with some reservations that he aptly refers to as “negative waves”.

From Jack Kerouac: “All human beings are also dream beings. Dreaming ties all mankind together.”

CHILD (playing)

For the first time in the story, children take center stage (always heard before, but not stand-outs); here, they enter intermittently somewhat as hecklers—at least from Ben's prospective.

In fact, the children are simply playing, minding their words but attempting to meet Ben on a different plane than his preferred role as that of mentor. Little feet, but big hearts, the children are the best medicine for a teen who still struggles with security. By and large, they welcome him—even encourage him—despite his practice of cheating in checkers. Meanwhile, Abby has returned; this time, with the power of her new found love that has almost been transforming—save only her own insecurity that is difficult to shake.



From J. D. Salinger; *The Catcher in the Rye*: "What I think is, you're supposed to leave somebody alone if he's at least being interesting and he's getting all excited about something. I like it when somebody gets excited about something. It's nice."

POT (melting)

Others are showing-up; COMMUNITY is coming together for a bit gathering as they carry-out plans to move. On the last night in the village, folks collect around the campfire in a bit of a celebration. New faces, some of which Bart had never seen, were now present and accounted for.



Ben is relaxed or, as Arc might call it, is mellow; thanks in large part to the passing of the pipe. Feeling the muse and relaxed, Ben impulsively begins a tune, “Mellow-Yellow” exchanging “yellow” with “fellow” while humming out a few notes of the melody. It’s all good, or at least groovy, on the backwaters of the Coosa River; persons of all color taking a few minutes to bask in the better half of life and living.

Lyrics from “Proud Mary; John Fogarty: “If you go down to the river, bet ya-gonna find a lot a people who live.”

DEAD (dwelling)

Once again association is drawn between native persons and COMMUNITY; this time, with attention to Desoto Caverns augmented with Ben's tenacious appetite for teaching.

Bart and Abby find themselves sitting in the classroom of ancient civilization; the sacred burial grounds of the Creek and other regional tribes. Here they discover life and living in a world like their own; for in fact, METRO and European expansion are eerily similar, COMMUNITY somewhat like the native life and living.



From John Wayne:

I don't feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves.

RIGHT (fighting)

Sal shows, once again, his sacrifice for the sake of others. COMMUNITY does not seek the fight but nevertheless, finds itself a contender in the fight; this time, in a trap.

They had to do something; there she was, a woman bound-up and most likely, as in the rescue, a hostage of some kind. They just couldn't do anything—it ain't right. It may not be living, but it is still, and somebody has to do it, if not now then later.



From Thucydides:

The nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man, and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards.

STRONG (arming)

Even with a broken nose and bleeding face, Bart is able to reach out and strong arm his attacker. What led to such quickness is simply an impulse to protect that (or those) which matter most. He really didn't plan to do it; no, it was a reflex.

What does it take to do such a thing; to stand-up and take it and, then, when you knocked-down, to keep going? Is it love or just loyalty; is it courage or just caring; is it sacrifice or just suffering? It is all of this; it is life and living.



From Winnie the Pooh: "If you live to be a hundred, I want to live to be a hundred minus one day, so I don't have to live without you."

SONG (sharing)

In the loss of Sal comes the gain of Sam, so thinks Mat. For they played music together; the two knew each other in their past life.

How wonderful to find that which was lost; as with a song or music that is heard and that, in turn, conjures up associations long buried in the brain, hidden in the heart. And still, to share such memories with the persons with whom you first shared.



Sam will speak—she will regain her voice—first her singing voice, then her speaking voice and finally, her spiritual voice. And who to share that with but the person with whom she first shared.

From Aldous Huxley: “After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.”

CHESS (playing)

Chess is but one game of several played in COMMUNITY. Even the children like to play chess as Arc alludes to.

But playing takes on other forms to: a play on words, conversation aimed at lighting the load, and the bantering between those who know the difference.



Playing is competitive, just as life and living. Arc, his new found fame, is a bit unnerving to young Ben. Still, the rise is not completely without celebration, as even Ben has benefitted from the Hip and learning that everything does not need to be so heavy.

From Tim Leary:

My advice to people today is as follows: if you take the game of life seriously, if you take your nervous system seriously, if you take your sense organs seriously, if you take the energy process seriously, you must turn on, tune in, and drop out.

CLOUD (watching)

The storm is coming, as Wes now realizes. Now, what to do? Should he press-on or turn back?

His choice to turn back is a tough one; he wants to see his family—perhaps for the last time—but is increasingly concerned about the storm, the impossibility of reaching his destination on the coast. And passing the time with deep thought is not enough to ward off his concerns. He must take action, again!



The signs are there; everything points to the certainty of the storm and finally, the certainty that he should turn-back, exclaimed in the clap of thunder.

From W. B. Yeats:

I know that I shall meet my fate somewhere among
the clouds above; those that I fight I do not
hate, those that I guard I do not love.

ROME (remembering)

A reflection on Rome occurs in the last hours of Cal's life and living. Why now, why Rome?

Well, as with much of the story, erudition is used to both to entertain thought but to elicit action; to compel COMMUNITY to learn even to the end.

Rome is so often compared with modern empires; it might be thought of as the beginning of the end—as empires and kingdoms rise and fall in the cycle of complex societies. But will they learn; or, as Pete Seeger ask: “when will they ever learn?”



From Dejan Stojanovic: “New Rome will be destroyed by the attacks of new vandals. God always remains silent.”

SUN (raining)

Some days sunshine, others rain; some days are diamonds, some are stones.

But as of late, the days have been all rain—along with winds and floods—with the possible exception of that warmth that remains steadfast in COMMUNITY.



And though the storm is pressing down, conversation turns upward to the belief in spirits; that those who pass can return and, in some way, make their presence known. Don't forget the lighter side of life to lighten the load.

From James Taylor, "Fire and Rain":

I've seen fire and rain

I've seen sunny days I thought would never end

I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend

But I'd always thought I see you again.

STRENGTH (growing)

Certainly trials and testing strengthen character just as fire hardens metal.

Arc is in such a process of character building: having arrived as weak in character, he is steadily distancing himself from the person named Nark; but even then, at the time of arrival, Arc was aware that his name had undesirable connotations—thus the reason for the alias.



Now moving-on, seeking that higher plane or new dimension, he is learning to define who he is by how he helps others—rather than singularly focused on self. Times are a-changin and so are those who change times.

From Bob Dylan: “I don’t think I’m tangible to myself.”

FAR (outing)

Capturing the changing times, the introduction of Hip and other '60s references, the image below symbolizes this blast from the past. But why this history, the era described by some as “the coming of age”?

COMMUNITY has much association to the idea and attempts of this time—the rejection of The Establishment—of consumerism and continuous conflict among other characteristics seen as dangerous and deadly.

“FAR-outing is more than a gathering, a celebration; it is a way of thinking and believing that goes against the covert and coercive power in the times. This thought and belief is not interested open revolution, but is deeply determined to question and even resist what history proves to be disaster and doom.



From George Carlin: “Think off-center.”

START (coming)

Wes remains resolute in his return to COMMUNITY; and though his decision was hard—both coming and going—he has made the hike with record speed, unimpeded by any problems—at least until the last leg.

In only a moment his return is at least delayed, having slipped and injured his head. But with some intervention and continued determination, he at last realizes his objective—at the least the latest of turning-back from the coast, making a return to COMMUNITY.

Such times elicit questions that might be expressed in this effort as, “Why did I feel so compelled to make the journey only to be denied my desire?” To that and similar circumstances of life, there may never be confirmed reasons or answers. What has to remain is the willingness to take risks against rewards, realized or not.



From Kevin Costner:

I haven't lived a perfect life. I have regrets. But that's from a lifetime of taking chances, making decisions, and trying not to be frozen. The only thing that I can do with my regrets is understand them.

FORE (telling)

The gift of THE LIGHT comes to the forefront again; this time channeled through Abby as to the immediate outcome of the storm, their survival.

Ben had a dream earlier; one that painted a grim outcome of widespread destruction in the wake of the storm. And while rightfully concerned in this vision, COMMUNITY remains hopeful in THE WAY.



Dreams and visions are not always reliable; such gifts have sometimes been too easily embraced as altogether authentic and accurate, leaving disbelief and disdain in those that depended on such.

How do they treat such gifts? They have learned caution and careful consideration simply because such can be as much a liability as an asset.

From Mickey Hart: “Dreams sometimes foretell the future.”

LIFE (enriching)

Mat is overjoyed that Wes found the way back; this and the insight of Abby have brought the best out of the worst storm in their recollection and record.

There is much satisfaction when success is the outcome; the realization the desired outcome from sacrifice, even suffering. But when success is not realized; well, that's what separates the strong from the weak, the rich in character from those who see such success as a right.

But life in THE LESSENING has no such rights; there is nothing that COMMUNITY can count on except what is of THE WAY. Only in their thought are the lives of these person enriched, one with the others and with themselves, their souls.



From Soren Kierkegaard: "Our life always expresses the result of our dominant thoughts."

*My idea of
marriage was
largely
fostered by
what I*

IN THE LESSENING

(loving)

What a way to end or close the story; hope expressed in song for peace, joy and love.

Sam shows that she has a voice; she speaks and then she sings, leading COMMUNITY in celebration of their survival of the storm.

Among the effects of the storm is the remapping of the shoreline and interior lands. The long predicted flood finally came and, with a fury, has left its mark—both on the region's surface and in the memories of survivors.

And so goes life and living in THE LESSENING; a hard life but a rewarding one too, they truly appreciate the fact that nothing can be taken for granted—that what we have been given is not our own.



From Peace Pilgrim:

To attain inner peace you must actually give your life, not just your possessions. When you at last give your life - bringing into alignment your beliefs and the way you live then, and only then, can you begin to find inner peace.