

## *The Island*

### V

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#### Thoughts In The Landscape.

Upon the Island, in order to gain some tranquility and/or perspective, and perhaps live a few brief moments outside of myself in touch with the raw wonderful mother, I had walked alone through the woods. A daily trip to the pond's dam to investigate the activity of beavers, would invariably lead me past the remains of Shyla.

The lower jaw had been stripped clean, long ago, of every edible or digestible morsel, its bony remnant now of a grayish hue tinged with an effervescent mossy green; it lies along the wooded pathway ringing the swamp, its teeth still in their sockets facing upwards. The skull proper lies nearby, its teeth also pointing skyward, the balance of the skeleton variously arrayed in close proximity, some bones obviously missing, others scattered, reposing upon our Mother's soggy breast.

*'Tis all that remains of Shyla*, the family milking cow, who passed on two days after birthing Julio, who at this writing was one and a half years old, weighing nearly seven-hundred pounds. His days were numbered; perhaps another year would round out his term; he existed as a portable burgeoning trove of red meat who ranged the island brush and occasional pasturage.

Shyla's career ended as a matter of course, her continuum rising to its zenith, only to decline, following so many wondrous impregnations, calvings and milkings, mysteriously catabolizing all the while, until finally cascading into its preordained nadir.

She had expired in the barn. In order to move the defunct organism, the farmer resorted to the chainsaw for partial dismemberment. He then enlisted the aid of Karl with his battered two-tone DORF pickup, with the "F" missing, her carcass tied with ropes to the rear bumper, to be dragged unceremoniously over grass and marl, gravel, rock, stump, sheep droppings, cowpies and horsebuns, to be deposited out of sight as fodder and delectation for carrion feeders, flies and maggots.

When I passed by during the previous year, the beast had been lying in state beside the pathway for some six months; her bones appeared whiter then, without the traces of moss, and still bearing some semblance of her former self, with a good deal of her holstein's black and white hide lying somewhat draped over and clinging to her mostly undisturbed skeleton.

Now, this one year later, I thought I perceived myself, as in some crypt, after one and a half years, all indices of my me-ness having fallen to this abysmal anonymity, even the hideous hide that had sustained all

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the storms, pricks and barbs, and containing the scars of the world's triflings; all having become morsel for some bacterial continuum.

For the most part Shyla had lain in peace, although exposed to all those aforementioned ravishings, her disturbance occasioned by the snortings, stompings and fartings of Red, the old wandering gelding from down the road, her most constant companion; he liked to pasture nearby. Occasionally the untended sheep, whose trails crisscross the whole wide world; and the wild ducks, who secret, rest and converse amongst themselves in the rushes of the swamp a few yards away; and the footsteps of the farmer and his Mrs., and ones such as I, intrude upon her exposed and protracted decay.

As if death and decay were not enough for Shyla to endure, she must listen to the fatal firings of the 30-30 beneath the hanging tree, where her brethren are coaxed, to be greeted by the inevitable deliverer; she hears their dying gasps, as their life's blood gurgles from their severed jugglers; as their bodies lie in a spasmodic quivering, their brains riven, splattered and disconnected. We are carnivores.

The hanging tree, from which the lifeless carcasses are hung, suspended from a beam jammed into their splayed rear hocks, hauled ass skyward as a 'four-by' or backhoe pulls the rope reeving the blocks attached to the tree limb and the beam. The hanging tree, in whose proximity, Patrick, her very own son wailed his last at a year and a half and nine-hundred pounds; where he was gutted, his innards flopping into the bed of the ubiquitous battered Japanese pickup to be hauled away; and from whose bed, the Man stood to chain saw his carcass in half.

And the farmer was heard to say: "If this won't turn you into a vegetarian, nothing will". The smell of warm blood, and the odor of disembowelment, and chain-sawed flesh clings to one's nostrils.

And further still Shyla's peacefully askewed repose must endure the sounds of the farm, the whine and roar of the irrigation pump sucking away from the swamp, and that awful bratt titta rattitta neeeeeaaarrrrhhh of the chain saw, and the cacophonous, unmuffled vehicular din of the island's four-wheeled participation in the modern world, as it bumbles down the dirt road, and the whop, whop, whop, whop of the whirly birds overhead in search of cannabis (how many joints did you eat in your travels Shyla?).

Sorry Shyla, even here in this remoter place, there doesn't exist any real repose. Burial would have muffled the sounds, but not given thee any greater distinction; for the world must go on. It may revere its dead, but it cannot hesitate in its onward and upward mania, as you may have discovered somewhat, even with your bovine intelligence.

Julio was to be the last; perhaps already dismembered; there will be no more, Shyla. Small comforts.

And the air in these climes, though damp at times, is fresh; the breezes blow often, rushing through, bending the trunks and bowers overhead,

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creating a symphony of whisperings, then, sometimes demonic howlings, as the Southeasters roar and moan. How much better this, than burial?

Although you are no longer about, your semblance is evoked; one is startled into a remembrance, unlike one might be who is buried beneath a pithy, orthodox headstone.

And what words would one trouble to carve for thee on a bare pair of boards nailed together, emulating the Crucifix, farmer-fashion, driven all cockeyed to thy gravity? Smile Shyla. Moo once, for Red\*; for all of us.

\* Sad to relate, Red too has joined the legions, buried in a hole excavated by the Island's Backhoe. He passed on at a venerable 26.

*While traipsing along* the Island's nearly overgrown logging roads, nearly overgrown with alder, I had begun to think of Serein, as one might think of Humpty-Dumpty.

She was a lovely engaging woman, a mother, a wife, and a sane presence in the community, nominally identified with the counter-culture contingent. That was my impression; I am impressionable.

"Stranded in the bush, on an island", one had speculated. "She got mixed up with some stuff that was goin' on in the Stone House", another conjectured.

The Stone House could be described as a dungeon above ground; it had been built by some occultist religious group; standing abandoned most of the time; occupied periodically by floating entities. Whatever happens in dungeons could have happened there, without Edgar Allen Poe; however, not to promote a prejudice, one visited there of his own free will. And, unless draculas or venomous creatures inhabit all the dark places, it would have been only some other two-legged look-a-likes who frequented the place - in order to get out of the rain, perhaps.

No one could have lived there for very long ... without going 'bananas' or turning into some blanched red-eyed creature. Surely, a few skylights would have altered the whole character of the place.

Perhaps it was dope and psilocybin along with some whirling and tumbling kaleidoscopic imagery, or psychedelic holographs, laced with 'speed', or LSD, testing the threshold of one's grip on reality.

That clear bright intelligence became fractured. One ascribes the mysteries of our fragilities, our vulnerabilities, to mystical interventions, to extraterrestrial agents. Our ordinary grip on reality, while it leads from pillar to post, may only represent a grasping; and perhaps we are more tethered to pillar and post than we realize.

Schizophrenia: a frightening label, to be sure. She, whose voice was always welcomed in its clarity, having spoken only necessarily, and in context, and as though assessing aright every issue. A sanity we could pray for, one that might possibly steer a path through our stalemate of man against man, that other horrendous disease.

A bright light in the bush; mishandled? Within - a host of wayward emotions, flippant, thrill-seeking; an act of desperation from out

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boredom? Reality! TOO REAL? And unwise enough to frustrate this crystalline intellect.

We, of less perfect manufacture, hold together, our impurities perhaps lessening the strain within the lattices of our minds.

The diamond inside her had shattered. Little bright fragments without coherence. Inner lights that scarcely responded to the stark issue just beyond one's circumscribed envelope.

I wonder ... The Stone House may have been only a symptom. Reality had been all too confining in its selfishness; one reached for nonsense to relieve the pressure, the strain of holding the world together.

And surely the M.D. converts a shambles into a windup toy that will smile and wipe its ass, and close the door; that will pay its bills and ambulate, a dullard with a question mark (crooked halo) hovering above. For a while.

The M.D. is some kind of curious way-station. In one's need, one submits to some kind of assistance; the helpless aiding the helpless.

Serein is Serein, not some case history. Her diamond does glitter, whole, and marooned, somewhere inside.

Her husband, who might have been more attentive at some crucial moment, now carries some heavy agony in his breast, a love bent upon itself, as she smiles distantly, as though through a veil. The children miss her when she visits the way-station. When she returns, they hang about her even though she is a rag-doll. They surely detect a strangeness, but are prone to skipping about; somehow the oddity of mother eludes them.

Her essence eludes me; this fragile personality whom I know not, but from this great distance. I have heard her speak, before it all happened, speak as clearly as any other, and more so, enough to take notice. A bright sparkle shone from her words. This backhanded eulogy becomes an epitaph to our fragility.

I ponder; who will put Humpty Dumpty back together again?

It has been my good fortune to be able to spend some time upon the Island during the fall season as winter begins to advance, with long nights, and short, often somber, stormy days. However mother nature dishes it up, I seem to feast upon the exposure in isolation. The only disagreement I have with mother nature is her tendency to prolong her deluges, preventing one from a casual enjoyment of her other amenities in the out of doors.

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### *A Not-So Still-Life:*

It had been sunny for a long time,  
Until boredom o'ertook the planet.  
The sun had departed southward for its wintering,  
Leaving a chill in its absence; and darkening.

A breeze sprang to greet the developing front;  
The yellow, red, orange brown of the trees  
Fluttered to the green sward below.  
The bell suspended from the eave chimed,  
As the cardboard label tied to its clapper seized the wind.

The dried ears of corn swiveled on their hanging twine,  
The stiff, dried husk-leaves crackling and quivering.

Everything accustomed to bending, did so,  
Some revealing their paler backsides,  
Others stiffly bracing,  
Springing a swishing return as breezes waned.

The mums tossed their colorful array;  
Then! A sudden Gust!  
The trees snowed a blizzard of leafings.

They will all have been whisked away, soon.  
And, t'will blow yet more fiercely,  
Though there may be naught aloft 'pon barren limb.

The incising cold will serve as reminder,  
We are to hibernate into a huddle.  
'Tis too late to harvest,  
'Tis too late to find dry wood.

Darkness will o'ertake the light,  
The cold o'ercome the heat,  
Winter rest heavily upon the living.

One morning I awoke to one of mother nature's spectaculars. She surprises us with such wonder, both in what she reveals and what she stirs within us. As I am writing these very words in my home in urban U.S.A. it is snowing a most unlikely mid-February snow, which is falling thick and heavy, sticking to everything, piling heavily upon the limbs, some of which are destined to break under the weight. In the middle of the night we shall hear the snappings, and cumbersome

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thuddings upon the roof. Perhaps the electricity will fail. Oddly today was the day I received the last of the packets of seeds I had been expecting to get the new season underway in the new greenhouse, the one inspired by Mrs. Farmer's upon Harmony Island. The snow has piled so high and weighty upon the greenhouse it cannot of its own adhesive properties hold on the slope any longer; the snow has crept down, rolling over the sharp eave edge like a glacier. As much as I dislike the inconvenience of this happening, at my age, and at this time of the year, and when I had not expected it, I can not deny the utter beauty, the absolute 'purity' of the whiteness. Really, there are no words to describe the pristine and unlikely arches upon arches of bowed trees touching upon each other and upon the earth, the evergreens folded up like penguins, limbs lying upon limbs, the trees taking the shape of exquisite, truly unimaginable steeples, only to be found on the grandest cathedrals of the future. The utter whiteness, and the seldom, seldom of seldoms, that comes to the metropolis, the raging quiet; quiet in a vengeful mood, like the quiet upon the Island.

Yes! now I recall that morning upon the Island:

*"This morning was absolute.*

The uncut hay lay every which way, yet if you studied it for a while you would discover that it leaned predominantly towards the Northwest, having been driven so by the Southeasters laden with heavy precipitation. The hay consisted of several grasses of uneven height.

An audible stillness prevailed, accompanied by the twitting of Juncos, and a ringing in my ears.

At dawn, upon peering out the window, beside my bed, I perceived a blanket of platinum. The moisture that had settled upon the world during the night had crystallized, forming a large flaky frost upon every surface, every edge. A quiet platinum; this morning was absolute.

A playground of dazzling platinum grasses. As the sun, locked into its inevitable journey, began to appear, touching upon the tassles of platinum, these turned to a yellow-silver, the ultimate dazzle; absolute.

The cosmic forces and energies embodied in the rays of the beaming light began to shrink the crystals ever so slightly. During this ever so slight thaw, though an absolute stillness prevailed, and not a breath, save mine, stirred, the grasses moved in abruption, as though spring-loaded, becoming unstuck in its yellow basking.

The mat of dazzling platinum became transformed into golden-silver, so startlingly radiant in the bright early winter sun, as to quite catch at one's breath.

Then, at the apex of the absolute moment, the frosty-dewed crystals began their melt, first upon the tips, again ever so slightly, in the

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cosmic radiation; bright little prisms of red, blue and green, like miniature tree-ornaments; only these were dainty hay ornaments.

This morning was absolute; a ringing in one's ears; the twit of juncos amidst a sea of silver-white or white-silver. A cold pristine quietude; a wintry beginning. Not so chill, however, as my fellow man debating how best to control the world, made in his own godless image, without blowing it to smithereens

Karl was no doubt stirring, getting ready to go to the mill. It was a day for running the planer, driven by a huge scavenged Ford V-8. Errol was preparing to put in another day at gyp-rocking, standing upon the adjustable scaffold, his palette of metal, held by a wooden peg, fastened in the center, upon which was piled a mixture of Synko 'mud', which he deftly removed and troweled with a broad putty knife, as though directing a symphony orchestra. An artist at work, depressed by man's pitiful actions. Errol was easily depressed; what's the use?

This morning was absolute. I do not wish to hear anything about God's handiwork; his little miracles, and mysteries. To put it plainly: Shit! I want to be dumbfounded and held spellbound by this beauty.

I do not wish to ascribe it all to some hack made in the hominid image.

My mouth was wide-open, agape at the absolute. I cannot, we cannot, transcend this elemental and elementary condition.

Reverence; Yes!; by all means; a speechless reverence; words fail us.

The purpose of one's eyes is to perceive beauty.

Hay!?!; Beauty?; My Foot! A Cruise Missile is a thing of beauty.

Can you imagine it, the contrast, and the abject waste? Again one is dumfounded, truly not being able to find the words; only a feeling of ANGER, and most irreverent thoughts.

But this morning was absolute; a platinum, silver-white quietude; a ringing in one's ears; a clamoring twit of a junco. Dumbfounded, I, truly speechless, with a feeling of AWE.

I am not Awed by the missiles. I am provoked to murder its makers and promulgators; the baronial bastards dominating one with FEAR and ANGER in their hope to achieve The Dominion of the One over the Other.

Little prisms of blue, red and green; miniature hay ornaments dangling upon yellow-silver fuzzes of spindly sagging grasses; a dazzling AWE.

Now, much later, most of the frost has disappeared; the hay has returned to its customary wintry tan-grey, somewhat yellowish in the bright sunlight.

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Only a memory now, of the absolute in beauty.

The Cruise Missile lives on; a chilling thought".