

MUSICA MUNDANA

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EAST OF EDEN

Chapter 1

-1-

The neurologist should be by any moment now.

Thank you.

Mrs. Addison? I'm Dr. Morgenstern.

Please call me Evelyn. This is my son Mark, and my daughter Mabel.

I'm afraid your husband suffered serious head trauma in the accident.

He was on his way to church to rehearse the choir for the Paschal Vigil. We were going to meet him there when the hospital phoned. We got here as fast as we could, but it's a long drive from Fall City to Harborview – on top of the weekend traffic.

I understand.

How's he doing?

Well, Mark, at the moment your Dad's unconscious.

Does that mean he can't hear us?

It depends. He may fade in and out.

What's the prognosis?

It's too early even for a full diagnosis. The next few hours are critical. You may want to make some phone calls.

I should have brought my address book with me. It was such a scramble getting out of the house.

I'll have the nurse bring you some blankets and pillows. Would you like a cup of coffee or...

-2-

...the heavens resound with the glory of God,
And the tuneful spheres echo his handiwork.

Day after day pours forth song,
Night after night makes melody.

There is no speech or tongue
Where their hymn goes unheard.

Their anthem sounds throughout the world,
And their praise to the ends of the earth.

-3-

Papa, what was that? I saw a starburst and then the whole heaven began to jingle and jangle like a clanging cowbell.

I was looking up at the sky when I saw a wandering star spin off the *Coma Berenices* and smash into Titius, sending sparks flying like a crushed coal.

It looked as if one came down on the West bank.

Chapter 2

-1-

Where am I?

You can speak? Until today, only the sons and daughters of Tonans were so endowed.

Where am I?

In Santo Monte.

Where's that?

We inhabit the southern slope of Santo Monte. Don't you remember? It's your home, too.

Sort of. But I don't know the names of anything. Who are you?

I'm Don, chief keeper of Santo Monte.

And who am I?

You are Draco, the fiery flying serpent.

Draco... Draco...

Do you remember what happened?

It was like awaking out of a deep sleep.

You've got a bad gash on your brow, and there's a spot of scorched earth on the grass nearby. The falling star must have hit you.

When did that take place?

Last night as we were celebrating the Sabbath.

Who's the "we"?

I, my wife Donna, daughter Rosabel and Kayin our son.

-2-

Husband, what did you find?

At first I saw a crumpled figure on the ground. Draco had been hit by the shooting star.

Was he hurt?

He was a little stunned by the impact, but that's not the main thing. As I approached, Draco rose up and began to speak.

How odd! I didn't know he knew how to speak. He has never done so before.

The sweet influence of the Pleiades must somehow have rubbed off.

What did Draco say?

He asked where he was, and who he was, and who I was.

He didn't remember?

He still seemed to be in a bit of a daze.

I must talk with him this afternoon.

As you wish, my wife.

The spheres didn't ring out the Sabbath last night.

For the first time I was unable to make out a star between Mars and Jupiter. The collision must have pulverized Titius and unstrung the heavenly lyre.

I wonder why Tonans would cause that happen. How will we keep Sabbath?

For now we can mark the days by phases of the moon, and midnight by the Southern Cross. Kayin and I will work out something more lasting and exacting.

Chapter 3

-1-

Draco?

Yes?

Don told me a little about what happened.

Who are you?

Don't you know me?

You look familiar, but everything was a blur before the star struck.

I'm Donna.

You look like Don, only different.

Well, we're kind of like male and female twins.

What does that mean?

What does *what* mean?

"Male" and "female," as well as "twin"?

He's a man and I'm a woman. And Tonans has granted us the power to make other men and women, but it takes...

Who is Tonans?

The Creator of the world. As I was saying, it takes a man and a woman to make other men and women. We call them our children. Sons are male children, and daughters female.

You mean, like Kayin and Rosabel?

Exactly!

And what about twins?

Twins are lookalike brothers or sisters.

What are brothers and sisters?

Children who share the same mother and father.

So you and Don had the same mother and father?

No, not really.

But you said...

I said we were *like* twins. Don and I didn't have parents.

Parents?

A father or mother.

But you also said...

I said that Tonans has made us with the power to make *other* men and women, not that he made *us* from other men and women.

How did he make you?

He made Don directly, and then drew me forth from Don. That is why we look alike.

When was that?

On the sixth day.

So you remember it well?

Not the deed itself.

What's your first memory?

The sky.

The sky?

Yes, the sky. When I opened my eyes on the sixth day, the first thing I saw was a turquoise sky.

Like the way I remember opening my eyes after the star fell from heaven.

I guess so.

So you didn't come into being by yourself?

No, Melos made me.

Melos?

The only Son and vice regent of Tonans.

And who's his mother?

He doesn't have a mother.

How did he come into being?

He didn't come into being. There was never a time before Melos.

I don't understand. You said that he is the *son* of Tonans. And you also said that...

Let me see how I can put it. Don and Kayin are human. So they're two of a kind. Tonans and Melos are divine. So they're two of a kind – really, three of a kind if we add Polymnia.

Polymnia?

The Spirit of Tonans.

Hmm. What is it to be human?

To be a creature with a rational soul and body of clay.

And what is to be divine?

To be the all-seeing and almighty Maker of time and space and everything therein.

Have you ever seen Polymnia?

No, but he sometimes assumes the form of a dove.

Did you see Melos on the sixth day?

No, he ascended right after making me.

Have you ever seen Melos?

No.

So how do you know of him?

When Don awoke he told me all about Melos.

How long ago was that?

Oh, let' see – that was more than a hundred-hundred moons ago.

In all that time, you've never seen or spoken to Melos or Tonans or Polymnia?

Yes, that's right.

So why do you believe in them?

I just said that Don told me what he saw and heard of Melos.

Yes, but you don't know it for yourself.

Well, no, but Tonans hasn't left us without a witness. He sends us sun and stream and seasons of abundance, filling our hearts with happiness.

-2-

Kayin, would you fetch me some broom wood for the smelter?

Yes, Mother! What do you need it for?

I want to cast a new flute.

Did you need it right away?

Whenever you happen to be in the area. Don't make a special trip.

In that case I'll save it for the morning. It's getting a little late. And I'll take Draco with me since I want to ask him a few questions.

Here are some wheat-cakes to take with you in case I don't see you before you leave. Oh, and if you happen to bump into Rosabel, tell her I need some more beeswax to make a casting for the flute.

Sure thing!

Chapter 4

-1-

Kayin, where are we headed?

The navel of the Garden.

Where's that?

Where the river winds around the tree of life.

Have you ever eaten from the tree of life?

Not yet.

Why not?

What's the hurry?

Why are we headed there, anyway?

My Mom needed me to gather some broom wood.
But before I do that I wanted to get some work in on
the new hedge maze.

What's the use?

It will serve as a star-chart to track the heliacal year.

And how will it do that?

My Dad and I are going to plant and position the
bushes to mark the heliacal rising of Sirius.

What do you need for?

Now that the spheres have gone silent, we need a calendar.

The spheres?

Yes, the ever-turning stars that used to sound the Sabbath.

What's the Sabbath?

It is a day of worship and rest.

Which day?

The seventh.

Every seventh day?

Yes.

Why that day?

Because it took six days for Tonans to make the world, and then he rested on the seventh.

But what's it to you?

He told us to labor six days a week and take the seventh day off.

Told *you*?

Well, my Dad, really.

Do you think all that's really necessary?

I don't suppose it's a natural necessity—like eating and sleeping. But it lends life a certain tune and tempo, without which living would just be one thing after another.

So Tonans doesn't need your worship?

Worship is what sets us apart from and far above the brute beast.

What is worship?

To honor, laud, love, trust and serve your Maker with thankful lips and grateful hearts.

How does it exalt you above the beast to serve another?

We are great by being creatures of a great and glorious God.

Don't you ever get tired of doing what you're told?

Why should I?

It looks like you're getting to be a man in your own right.

Yeah, I'm getting to that point, and when I'm there I guess I'll make more of my own decisions. But we're still a family. We live and work and worship together. Anyway, I do what Dad says, and Dad does what Tonans says.

Okay, but won't a time come when you outgrow Tonans as well?

Tonans knows everything, which is way more than I ever will.

Rosabel, I was hoping to find you!

Where've you been?

I took Draco with me to see the hedge maze.

Did he say anything?

He asked a lot of questions, mostly.

I'd like to speak with him too.

I was sorry to miss you this morning. Hey, did you see the wingéd womb of the dawn?

I'm afraid I didn't get up that early. What did it look like?

The drowsy sun shot forth little lashes which licked hungrily at the underside of the high-horized clouds until the entire sky was aflame with tongues of fire flying from broad-rimmed belt of heaven and rising to the gabled firmament.

Like an upside down forest fire.

Yes! Oh, before I forget, Mom wanted you to bring her some beeswax.

Good, I'll take Draco along.

Chapter 5

-1-

Rosabel, where were we going this morning?

To raid a beehive.

What for?

For beeswax.

What's the use?

My Mom makes wax molds for casting her flutes. The stuff also comes in handy for candle-making and waterproofing. And, of course, the honey's the best part of all.

How so?

My mother uses it as a sweetener in baking her wheat and raisin-cakes. And it keeps them from drying out as fast. We also apply it to scrapes and scratches and burns.

Where do bees build their hive?

In the clefts of the cliffs, mostly. Why are you stopping?

What's that sound?

What sound?

The sound of something splashing and plashing?

Oh, I hear it now. That's where one of the tributaries washes up against a cave hollowed out of the cliff. I go there often. The soft sound of the echoing eddies against the grotto wall makes it a quieting place of prayer.

How did you find the hive in the first place?

If you follow the flight of the swarm you get a rough idea.

And how do the bees find the hive?

They dance a little jig that somehow conveys the location. Bees are such clever little creatures. Wait until you see the hive, with its honeycombed configuration.

How can anything so small be so smart?

They were fashioned by the same wisdom which balances the wing on the wind and spreads the cedar from a nutshell.

Tonans, you mean?

Yes!

But why assume that anything balances the wing on the wind save for the wind itself?

That's like acting as though the waggle dance were only a dance, and not a speech set to dance. But just as this little jig is a sign of something else, so Tonans speaks to us in the muted tongue of light and

shadow, wind and water, moor, mountain and so much more.

-2-

Papa, I was wondering if you or Kayin could put up a bird-feeder by my hut.

What for?

It would draw the songbirds. That way I would hear them every waking hour of day and well into the wee watches of the night.

But would that not attract every breed of bird, and not only the songbirds?

I'll shoo away the ravens and bluejays.

Anything else?

Yes, and after that I'd like one of you to build me a dovecote.

Chapter 6

-1-

Draco, I was just going down to the hedge maze this morning to check on Kayin's progress. Would you like to come with me?

Sure! Tell me, Don, what's the first thing you remember?

Seeing the face of Melos.

How did that happen?

He had taken clay from the riverbank, and kneaded the lump into a doll-shaped figure—the way Rosabel used to do as a little girl. And then, when he breathed breath into its breathless frame, I awakened from my oblivion; and as I opened my eyes, I saw his face.

What did he look like?

He looked like me.

What do you mean?

He had taken the form of a Tetramorph.

A what?

A four-faceted, six-wingéd seraph.

What did it feel like to go straight from a lump of lifeless clay to sense and spirit?

The world was at once old and new. Somehow I already knew the names of everything, but in a smooth, flat, featureless sort of way. The sheer sensation of space and smell, taste and texture was new to me.

What else happened?

He flew me to the top of Santo Monte and showed me the whole of the vale and surrounding countryside, fanning downward and outward like a terraced garden.

What else?

Then he told me how he had made the world.

What did he tell you?

“In the beginning Tonans said, ‘Let there be song!’ And Polymnia fanned forth the laudable stars as Melos strung and strummed the heavenly lyre.”

Like echoes in a cave?

Appointed for the cosmic concert of the spheres.

Did he say anything else?

After telling me how he made the world, he then told me how he would rest from his labors on the morrow. And that was when he gave me the Sabbath commandment.

Sounds like a long day.

Not by half, for he saved the very best for last.

What do you mean?

That afternoon, Melos cast me into a deep sleep, and when I awoke I saw a soft figure close by, with her back to me—as round and smooth as a riverine valley. Then, as she swung about, with her hair the color of a summer sun, and a bosom full as a pendant pear tree, our eyes met and mingled like the fireflies of the night.

-2-

Good, you brought some rock salt from the mine. We were getting low and I was about to ask Kayin to fetch some more.

The early morning air was heavy with the heady scent of frankincense. After you're done we should walk the fields together.

I'll be done momentarily.

What are you working on, anyway?

Before I chill the cheese and buttermilk in a nearby brook, I need to waterproof these goatskins with the leftover beeswax that Rosabel brought me.

Can I help?

Hold open the mouth so that I can pour in the hot wax and slosh it around.

Chapter 7

-1-

Don, don't you ever feel trapped?

I don't know what you mean, Draco.

The valley is walled about by mountains and monumental hills. So the scenery never changes.

Here we're safe from wind and rain and ravening beasts.

Yes, but when does a walled garden become a rose-strewn prison? You always know what's coming next. Doesn't life without an element of risk become a living death sentence? Immortality a curse?

Every day is much alike—yet ever anew. Just look at the river! For a hundred-hundred moons and more our mighty stream has kept a steady southward surging pulse. Yet see how it flows and slows and slackens and swells, shifting shade and hue as cloud, sun and sky dye it by day, moon and stars silver it by night, and trees imbue it by season—while every crested comb and fluted wave was other than the last. So time shall never pall the varied cadence of our daily ways.

Yes, but don't you ever dream of what it would be like to live elsewhere or be someone else?

"Dream?" I don't know that word. What's a dream?

A dream is when you see things in your sleep.

I still don't get you. I close my eyes at night and open them at dawn, but never have I seen a vision of the night – not I, nor my wife and offspring.

But surely there are times, after an anxious day, when you sometimes relive that experience in your sleep.

Anxiety? What's that?

Well, if not that, then there must be times when you do in dreams what you've always had a sneaking desire to do, but never dared to try in real life.

Whatever do you mean! What do I want that I don't already have? What do I want that I can't have? And why would I want something I can't have?

But nothing is more natural than for people to dream.

What people? What other people are there besides the four of us, not counting yourself?

Never mind!

I don't know what to make of you, Draco. You sometimes seem to know less than you should, but at other times, more than you should! Are you altogether what you seem?

Kayin, the lamps are running low on oil. Would you to bring me a basket of olives?

Of course, Mother!

Here's a basket. Oh! What happened to your finger?

Nothing much. I pricked it climbing a palm tree.

Let me put some honey on the sore so that it'll heal quicker. Maybe you could knock down the coconuts with a sling and some smooth stones from the river.

That's a good idea. I'll give it a try.

Chapter 8

-1-

Kayin, does it ever rain or snow in the dale?

No, Draco, the dale is sheltered all about by the wide rising hills.

Where does the river come from?

It's a mountain stream.

Where does it go?

You mean, where does it come out?

Yes.

It empties into the sea.

Will it ever fill up?

No, the runoff turns into rain, and the rain into snow, and the snow into snowmelt.

How do you know all this?

My Dad's been up to the mountaintop. There he saw the snow-mantled summit, saw the frosted slopes, saw the water running over volcanic dunes and plunging down varved valleys until it reached the glassy sea—where a noonday sun was lifting and drifting clouds like fleecy flame or angel down.

The last time we spoke we were talking about the tree of life.

What of it?

Is that why you can never leave the valley? Tonans keeps you tethered to the tree of life, like a dog on a chain. For if you ever left, you'd age, and sicken, and die.

Who says we can never leave the valley? We don't want to, that's all!

But how long could you live outside the vale? Wouldn't you grow old?

I don't know. Maybe one bite will seal our youth. Or perhaps we'd plant the seeds wherever we went.

There is another means of immortality.

Which is what?

Possession.

Possession?

The incubus preserves its host.

The incubus?

An angel—like another soul. I'm surprised that Tonans should keep such knowledge from you. Is he afraid that a fleshing would one day exalt his throne above the stars of God and sit atop the mount of the congregation—like the Most High himself?

If he were worried about that, why'd he make us at all, or offer us the tree of life? But back to this incubus you speak of – what happens to the soul of the host?

Oh, it passes through dry places. The experience is hard to describe—like a strange taste. If you're curious, I could arrange it for you. Want to give it a try?

I wonder what my Dad would say about this. I'll have to ask him.

Aren't you getting a little old to seek his advice all the time?

He's seen and heard a lot more things than I.

But that's just the point. You need to see and hear things for yourself.

Why? His eyes and ears are just as good as mine. Besides, it's wise to judge the unknown by the known.

Yes, but he's so set in his ways by now that he wouldn't approve of anything risky. But you're young and adventurous. Don't wait until you get to be like him – it'll be too late to change.

Why change when we're happy the way we are?

-2-

Rosabel, what are you staring at?

Nice to see you, Kayin! I was combing for fire opal and lapis lazuli. I just spotted an opal on the riverbed.

Where?

Over there! Can you make it out?

I think I see it now. I'll make a dive for it. There you are!

Don't you love how its hues scintillate like living rainbow trout?

Should we search for some more?

Not especially. It's nice just to wade, hand-in-hand, in cooling streams and supple sands.

Sometimes I sit by the bank and watch the whirlpools twirl and swirl every whichways.

It's so soothing, don't you think?

The river deepens up ahead. Did you want to go for a swim?

No, the current's too strong. Why don't we lie back on the bank for a spell before returning? Oh, look! See the Heron—white as a noonday moon against the ice blue sky!

And the crane—over by the watercress! Let me pick you a water lily before we leave.

I'll put it in my hair.

Chapter 9

-1-

Rosabel, what's that thing around your neck?

A necklace.

Why would you want to tie rocks around your neck?

They're kind of pretty – that's all.

What sort of stones are they?

Fire opal and lapis lazuli.

Where did you find them?

In the riverbed.

Imagine how many must lie at the bottom of the falls?

I suppose there's quite a pile by now.

Kayin should rig a hemp or flaxen ladder to gather more.

That would be dangerous. What if he slipped and fell?

Love hazards much.

Maybe so, but not for foolish gain.

Didn't you say the stones were pretty?

Yeah, but it only takes a handful to string a necklace.

But if you could choose the choicest...

I'm happy with whatever Tonans sends my way.

Does Kayin find you pretty?

So it seems.

Then imagine how much more so if you were adorned in the very finest fire opal and lapis lazuli.

Draco, you have such funny ideas! Why should I continually concern myself with what may be or might have been? Is it not enough to take joy in the world around us than fancy some other?

-2-

Papa. You and Mom have been married so long. What's it like?

Why do you ask?

Draco wondered if Kayin thought me pretty. That never occurred to me before.

Well, a husband is to his wife as a bee to the rose. Unless the bee pollinates the rose, the rose shall never blossom. And unless the rose flowers forth, the world will lose its many-hued mien and honeyed scent and sweet savor. So the bee blesses the rose, and the rose blesses the bee.

So that a woman renders by receiving?

Yes, just like the rosebush and the bee. For whatever she receives, she returns in the form of nectar; and whatever he receives, he returns in the form of honey. So they need each other and feed each other in a roundelay of life and love; but each in turn—for the bee comes courting the rose, and never the rose to the bee!

Chapter 10

-1-

Don, how do you know when to celebrate the Sabbath?

Until the night of the falling stars, the tuneful spheres chimed in the Sabbath eve and rang out the Sabbath morn.

Which causes me to wonder—how can sound traverse the vast immensities of empty space?

It ripples out and rides upon the ether—like tree-rings— from center to circumference.

What center or circumference? When we look up at the sky we see outer space extended endlessly in all directions.

I don't follow you.

The globe and other shining orbs float in vacant space, like sparks from a campfire, or particles of dust dancing in the sunlight.

Now I see what you mean. But you've got everything turned inside out— for the cosmos lies within.

Within what?

Within the hollow of the earth, of course!

I don't picture what you're saying.

Seated centermost amid the myriad spheres of song is the Father of lights, where there's never the shadow of turning, but round about which whirl and whirl the ever-rolling, ever-tolling spheres of light—like so many wheels within wheels. When we look straight up at the sky, we're staring straight into the centrum of the universe from our station on the inner rim. For heaven occupies the nucleus, while our sun wings the outermost orbit.

But if that is so, then how come I cannot see the earthly antipode across the deep?

Because the light bends and bounces off the surface of the sea, as do the wailing waves of sound.

If what you say is so, then could I fly upon the ether and reach the throne of Tonans?

No, for a moving object would grow ever smaller and move ever slower as it neared the center of being.

How then do angels come and go?

They move their minds from place to place, and act upon space by acting on the mind of man and beast.

Why did Tonans let the spheres go silent?

I don't know the reason, but I do know *him*, and that is reason enough!

What would happen if you broke the Sabbath?

Tonans would exile us.

Is there a way out of the dale? I thought it was hedged about by perpendicular falls and high horizontal hills.

There's a mountain pass along the eastern ridge.

What lies on the other side?

Midelerth.

What's that like?

It's a wasteland, where the winds wander and howl habitually.

Have you ever been there?

No.

Then how do you know?

I saw it once from the mountaintop. And our waterfall overlooks the lowlands of Midelerth, where we sometimes see and hear the trees wave and wail in the wind and the fire. And every now and then a savage beast falls from a cliff into the valley. Kayin and I have removed their fearful fangs and awful claws to craft tools and piercing implements. And from time to time a hawk or eagle will fly into the valley to snatch a kid from the flock.

Sounds like nature wears a cruel countenance.

Nature is indifferent, but God is gracious, for he planted the garden; and if our lot has fallen upon pleasant places, that is altogether owing to his sheer goodness and utter lovingkindness.

So you could survive outside the dale?

For a time, but denied the tree of life we would soon sicken and die.

What means it to die?

The spirit would depart, and the body return to its statuary state, before the Lord breathed life into our sculpted clay.

And the spirit?

There is a death beyond death, for the soul is indivisible and incorruptible.

-2-

Rosabel was asking me about marriage last night.

Well, she's of age, and so is Kayin. So the prospect may be beckoning to the both of them.

Should we feel them out?

No, they'll come to us when they're ready.

It's been a long day.

The dusk was humming with the nuptial nocturne of the cicala.

But the evening air is noiseless now—save for the mournful dove and lilting lyrebird.

Yes, the turning of the day draws near.

Steal away with me,
My sweet;
And let us make love
Under the myrrh
And the myrtlewood,
Locking our lips
And our hips
In longing embrace;
Falling asleep
To the tuneful lullaby
Of the lyrebird,
And awakening
To the matinal madrigal
Of the turtledove.

Chapter 11

-1-

Donna, earlier this morning I heard you imitating bird-song with a shiny stick.

That was a flute.

I've heard Rosabel speak of it. How does it work?

If you blow into a hallow shaft, the vibrations propagate an edge tone.

When did you discover that?

I was blowing into a ram's horn to remove dust and dirt.

What do you make your flutes out of?

I started with reed and cane. Then I tried boxwood. But I discovered that gold is best.

Where do you find it?

Nuggets wash down from upstream. They leave a faint glint and glimmer in the shallows, making them easy to spot.

And where do you find such pretty tunes?

They just sound in my head, unbidden and unseen.

But what's the use?

Music is another world alongside ours—a world without space or color or texture, but bearing a kinship to the world of sight and touch—as if both worlds were shadows cast by a common sun. I guess it reminds me of Tonans, and Melos, and Polymnia.

How so?

The whole Heaven is a columbarium, and the earth an aviary — like Rosabel's little dovecote.

And yet, have you never felt you're a caged canary — the way Tonans keeps you cooped up in this precipitous valley? Don't you yearn to spread your wings and see more of the real world?

But, Draco, even a bird of passage flies home for summer.

Okay, but why suppose that Tonans stands behind the world of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell? Why not stay with what you can see and feel, and leave it at that? Why this incessant urge to peer into the dark?

I guess it reminds me of when I hear a tune in my head, and then I play it on my flute, and then you hear me play my flute. But before it could sound in your ears and resound in your head, my tune had to sound in my head and resound on my flute. Behind your inward hearing was your outward hearing, behind your outward hearing my outward playing, behind my outward playing my inward hearing. So

what was unseen gave rise to what was seen, unheard to what was heard, unfelt to what was felt.

-2-

Mother, I think it is time that I propose to Rosabel.

I knew such a day was coming. But why just now?

I no longer see her as I used to.

How so?

Several Sabbaths past I caught sight of her bathing by the willows, in the warm waters of a bayou – with the wet hair lapping her back and fondling her breasts like long-fingered grass in a gentle stream; and as she rose up from the shallows, and stepped out of the shadows, and came streaming forth to oil her skin under the open sun of the forenoon firmament – well, I felt different about her – the way I’ve seen my father look at you.

Have you expressed your feelings to her?

Not yet.

She was talking to your father about marriage a couple of days ago, so now may be an opportune time. I think she’s ready.

If she consents, when should we hold the ceremony?

The Sabbath is our appointed day of thanksgiving and celebration, and this is as fit an occasion as any.

What other preparations will we need to make?

You should have her fetch me some fleece so that I can weave a sleeping mat for the two of you.

Chapter 12

-1-

Kayin, are you ever curious about Midelerth?

I sometimes sit beside the thin-rimmed bluff and watch the waters go over—thicker than a cedar beam—with the wind in my face and the thunder in my ears, as they form a pool on the bottom—looking like a second sky and gliding like a cloud across the high heavens—before finally dividing into four flumes flowing southward and eastward and westward. There I sit and watch and wonder where all they go.

Do you plan to live in Santo Monte forever?

I don't know. That's a long ways off.

Will you father sons and daughters of your own?

Yes.

And they will have kids as well.

Yes, that's the natural order of things.

Won't there come a time when your posterity shall outgrow the vale?

It's a spacious valley—a good day's journey from the foothills to the falls.

But over time your posterity will multiply to the point where even this capacious vale cannot encompass the sum of them.

I suppose so.

Won't they then have to cross over into Miderlertth?

I guess so.

How will they deal with the wilderness?

I reckon they'll tame it and till it the way we've learned how to tend and keep the valley.

So you plan to turn the whole world into a garden?

Something like that.

Will Miderlertthlings keep the Sabbath?

I never gave it a thought.

But it's possible that Miderlertthlings won't have to follow the same rules as Santomontanes?

I'm not looking that far ahead.

But wasn't the sennight cycle already broken once the tuneful spheres had ceased to sound?

Unless and until we hear a new word from Tonans, we shall abide by the last.

Doesn't it rain in Miderlertth?

Yes.

So there'd be days when a Miderlertthling couldn't see the moon or stars.

What of it?

How could he keep the Sabbath unless he could count time by the stars?

You're talking about a time that may never come, and even if it did, I'll leave that to the word and will of Tonans.

Why believe in what you cannot see?

Such as?

Tonans!

What about him?

Why assume he's even there?

Every now and then I sit and watch as a rainbow forms over the falls. Whenever I see the rainbow, I never see the sun—for the sun lies behind me. Thus, I can never behold both at once, for my back is always turned to one or the other. And yet, without the sun, there is no bow—but only rain. So in a sense I sense the insensible presence of the unseen sun within the bow. And Tonans is like the light of the sun at my back and brightening the path ahead.

-2-

Rosabel, where's your water lily?

It withered. That's what happens when you take a water lily out of water! But it was lovely while it lasted.

Let's go get you a fresh garland. I spotted a field of wild flowers just over the hill.

Here's a bunch of bellflower. And over there's a clump of Easter lilies.

Look at the fleur-de-lis and trefoil!

And see the Madonna lily—behind the star-of-Bethlehem?

Here, have a chalice-flower to finish your bouquet.

I now have so many flowers that I smell like a spring garden.

And you look like a strolling flowerbed! Rosabel.

Yes, Kayin?

Would you consent to be my wife?

I was hoping you'd ask!

I was hoping you'd be hoping! Come, then, and let us carve our initials in the trunk of this righteous oak tree as a troth and token of our enduring love.

Chapter 13

-1-

Papa. I need to shear a sheep before the sun is off the Eastern ridge. May I take Draco along?

Go right ahead.

We need to cross the river to reach the West bank.

How will we ford the river?

Papa and Kayin built a cedar bridge.

Why do you keep your livestock on the West bank?

Because Kayin has his vegetable garden on the East bank, and the grazing stock would get into the garden.

What's that – over there?

That's where Papa and Kayin fenced off part of the field.

Why?

To keep the livestock away from the poppy fields.

Why?

When they graze on those flowers they start to act funny.

Why does your family even bother with gardens and grazing animals? Don't the trees supply a natural diet?

Yes, but Tonans told us to tend and dress the garden. Not just leave it wild.

Why are you halting?

I was watching the wildflowers flutter and sway in the wayward wind—like a cloud of butterflies. In their noiseless, voiceless way, even the trees of the field applaud their God as the mountains and high hills laud the Lord of all.

You and your family seem to see his hand in every stray strand of hair and falling swallow. There's no turning you aside.

-2-

Well, Rosabel, it looks like all the stars came out this night to celebrate with you.

Yes, Father. See the Bear with her cubs!

Have you noticed how brightly the Evening Star is shining tonight?

Indeed, it's been gathering strength steadily all week long—brighter now than a new moon. I've never seen it so.

I see your Mother has been busy preening you for the morrow.

How do I look?

Your rippling red hair shimmers in the lamplight. No terraced garden or cherub wing was ever so soft and fair. And as the light leaves off, its saffron-scented fragrance shall perfume the midnight air. When such beauty may blush the very shade, what greater grace as yet awaits the break of day?

Has the Sabbath begun?

Yes, midnight has passed—see how the cross begins to bend?

Chapter 14

-1-

Papa, what was that?

It shot up into the air like a volcanic plume. Let's go and see.

Dad, look over here! I think it's Draco – or what's left of him, in a heap of dust and ashes. What could have happened?

I guess the Pleiadean trance at last has lifted.

-2-

Husband, did you bring the dates and raisin-cakes for the wedding feast?

Yes. But what about the Pomegranate juice?

I've got that in a goatskin.

Before the marriage ceremony, let us sing a Sabbath song:

Bless the Lord,
Beyond compare!

Wrapped in clouds
Of impenetrable light,
Nothing needing,
Font of all being
Of all things proceeding
Declaring the end,
From the very beginning;
No sparrow falls
Without his will.
For in his book of days
Were all things writ
Before they came to be.

Praise the Lord,
Who spread the heavens
As a canopy,
And pitched a tent
For the sun;
Who named
And numbered
All the stars,
When the day-stars

Sang in unison
And all the sons
Of God gave praise.

Bless the Lord,
All his angels,
Messengers
Who bear his word;
Bless the Lord,
All his host,
Ministers
Who work his will.

Praise the Lord
From heaven;
Praise the Lord
From highest heaven.

Praise him:
Thrones,
Dominions;
Praise him:

Cherubim,
And seraphim;
Praise him:
Principalities,
And powers,
Praise him:
Angels,
And archangels,
Praise him:
Angels of wind,
And water
And fire.

Praise him:
Sun,
And moon,
Praise him;
Stars,
And shooting stars.

Praise him
With the timbrel

And the dance,
Praise him
With strings
And organs;
Let everything with breath
Praise the Lord.

Kayin, Rosabel— are you ready?

Lo! My Queen! See how she comes,
Rising like the incarnadine dawn,
Wreathed in the moon, stars and sun;
Veni, sponsa, de Libano.

Lo! My King! See how he comes,
Bounding over mountains,
And overleaping hills;
The chief among ten thousand!

Her breast— a cluster of grapes,
Her mouth— the blood of grapes,
And her lips like a sealed spring,

Or a walled garden.

His raven locks,
His pillared limbs,
And thigh like an ivory tusk,
Or rod of iron.

I am the Rosabel of Sharon,
The waterlily of the valley;
My beloved is mine,
And I am his.

Hearthstone of my heart,
And opal of my eye;
Set me as a seal within your breast,
For many waters cannot quench our love...

MERIBAH

Chapter 1

-1-

...Mabel, call the nurse! Tell her to page Dr. Morgenstern.

I was stroking his hair when the monitor flatlined.

We almost lost him. But his vital signs have stabilized.

Thank God!

So, did you say your husband's a musician?

Uh, yes, he's an organist and choir director.

How did he get into that?

He had originally planned to go into the ministry. In fact, he attended seminary. But he always took a special interest in all things musical.

You have two lovely children.

Mabel's a godly girl. But it hasn't rubbed off on Mark.

It often takes longer for boys to come around. The accident may even be a godsend if it makes your son reflect on the big questions.

It will either drive him closer to God or push him further way – like his Dad.

What about his Dad?

He was a preacher's kid. But he definitely backslid in his teens and twenties, even dabbling in the occult—I think—as well as indulging in the usual run of vices to which young men are so prone. Yet he was wonderfully saved shortly before I met him.

Any preachers on your side of the family?

No, nothing so noble. My father was a tiller of the earth, and my brother a keeper of flocks...

-2-

...my fellow Orpharions. We gather together this evening, under the benefic auspices the Dragon's-head, to inaugurate the Orpheum. Without your whole-souled support it would have been impossible to purchase the old waterworks and convert that plant into this sacred compound. Every one of you who has left houses and lands, family and friends for my name's sake will be rewarded a hundredfold here and hereafter. The Orpheum is your new home, and your fellow Orpharions are your newfound family. I shall be your father, and you shall be my people. Here we will dwell together and hold all things in common, and none of us shall set foot outside the Orpheum until we consummate the Orpharion Age

Tonight marks the advent of a new epoch in human history. What is the mission of the Orpheum? In brief, its mission is to bring peace to our troubled planet.

Over the decades and, indeed, centuries, there have been many movements, many post-graduate schools, many degree programs, many think-tanks devoted to promoting the cause of peace on earth. Yet our globe is still a battlefield for civil wars and world wars and holy wars. Why has world peace eluded us, despite so many well-meaning efforts?

I submit that this is due to a failure to deal with peace-making as a science—yes, that’s right, as a hard, precise science. Up until now, it has been relegated to a branch of the humanities—to noble speeches and education initiatives, international resolutions, conventions, protocols and what not. As a consequence, our efforts have only resulted in a requiem without a rest.

And that is because it is still treating the symptom rather than the underlying pathology. If you look straight up into the duodecogon dome, you will see the inscription: “*L’uomo è modello dello modo.*” For man is a microcosm of the world—just as a shining dewdrop mirrors in miniature the outward and inward worlds. The reason we suffer so much discord in human affairs is that man has fallen out of tune and temper—quite literally, and not merely in metaphor—with the cosmic order of things.

For, as Plato puts it in the *Timaeus*, there exists a natural affinity between musical, spherical, and spiritual harmony. Dissonance occurs when the inner revolution of the soul falls out of harmony with the outward revolution of the spheres. We can only

stabilize the soul's eccentric orbit by imitating the stars. And the *musica humana* mediates between the *musica mundana* and the motion of the soul.

To the Greeks we owe the discovery that music is inwoven into the very fabric of the cosmos. Beginning with Plato and Pythagoras, and running thence from Ptolemy and Nicomachus, Augustine, Capella, and Cassiodorus, Boethius, Ammonius, Apuleius, and Macrobius, through Dante and Kepler, and all the way up to Hindemith and Witten, this vision has been held aloft—like a beacon in the dark. And yet with no practical payoff.

Now it is a cliché to say that music is the universal language. Dogma divides, but music unites; for dogma is judgmental, but music is ecumenical. Moreover, the mood-altering effects of music have been known since the days of David and Orpheus. Yet, as we also know, the soothing influence of music is fleeting. It lasts only as long as the music lasts.

An ancestral memory of the *musica mundana* echoes still in our calendar, where every day of the week takes its name from a planetary god. And every now and then a mystic such as Swedenborg or Scipio, Caedmon, Blake or Boehme, has penetrated the veil of perception and overheard snatches of the *Natur-Sprache*. Blesséd Urania has whispered in their ear. But what they brought back was brief and broken—like a few bars torn from a manuscript.

The trouble with the mystic and musician, poet, physicist and metaphysician, is the want of a sound, scientific method. For peace-making is an engineering problem. Man is a stimulus-response organism, and by applying the right conditioning we can program a peaceable disposition.

But before then, we must hone in on the monomelody, which underlies all periodic motion. And this is a two-step process. The monomelody is encoded in nature—encoded in bird-song and whale-song, in the seven primary metals and the seven planetary motions—as they echo the seven heavens in their psychopompous song. By means of systematic induction and rigorous analysis, we can decipher the code and extract the formula. And once we have the formula, we will then be able standardize and amplify the mood-altering power of music.

-3-

I thought the speech went over well, didn't you?

They seemed suitably impressed.

I had hoped that my own wife would be cheered by it as well.

Not at my time of life. I'm casting shadows now—long, sharp shadows across a grassy grave. In our equatorial prime we cast no shadows, for then the light of life is equally distributed and sunny all around. But at the horizon of life we cast shadows—

first facing westward into the day, then eastward into the night.

But without shade, life lacks depth!

Yes, but it comes too early or too late! So let's go to bed and be done with it.

Chapter 2

I figured I'd find you in the summerhouse.

Good to see you, Annabel. Want a raisin-cake?

No thanks! I prefer junk food to health food! What are you working on?

I'm experimenting with different herbal blends.

Why?

My Dad thinks that by tripping out we can access altered states of consciousness.

What's the point?

It's like having another window onto the world—or maybe a window onto another world.

Who's this Urania I hear him talking about?

Oh, that's a just a nickname for his tinnitus. It must be acting up again. It's been bugging him off and on since Seth and I were kids.

You mean he's making it all up?

Depends on what you mean. He really believes he's incepting signals from the great beyond—whether or not that's all in his head.

So he's crazy?

Maybe a mad genius. My Dad's always had a knack for games and numbers and puzzles. But if you live in

your own head all the time you can get a little funny in the head. You begin to hear hidden messages in strawberry fields and detect cosmic conspiracies in a barcoded tube of toothpaste. Every bush becomes a burning bush.

I don't remember my Dad very well. He deserted us when I was just a toddler.

Why did he walk out on your Mom, anyway? Was there another woman?

No, he left her for another man!

What a bummer! How'd she cope?

She kept company with Jack Daniels. And while we're on the subject, why did your Mom bail out on the marriage?

I was too young to know at the time, and my Dad's been less than fully forthcoming, but from what I can tease out of him and piece together on my own, she had him figured for a small-timer, and got tired of waiting for her ship to come in.

Well, you should thank your lucky stars that you and Seth got to stay with your Dad. That's so important for growing boys.

Maybe, but we never got to do normal guy-stuff like going to the ball game.

Why not?

Let's see, how did my Dad once put it?—"Playing fetch the ball is fine for a dog, but scarcely the chief end of man!"

Hmm. So many exotic plants! What's that tall treelike thing?

A century plant.

Why hasn't it flowered along with the rest?

It only blossoms once in a hundred years, and then withers away.

How sad!

How life-like!

What about that lavender bush?

That's a Judas tree.

And the shrub beside it?

A Yacoum plant.

Chapter 3

-1-

My fellow Orpharions. We come together tonight to dance the pannuchian dance on the eve of a world revolution—a global revolution founded on the revolution of the spheres. Just as the heavenly host broke forth in a doxology of peace on the night of the Nativity, so too, on this night of all nights, *Lyra* is vibrant with the *harmonia mundi*, if only we had the ears to hear the cosmic gospel sounding in the stars.

This represents an age-old yearning. In Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue*, the sibylline oracle announced the end of the Iron Age, as a virgin-born ruler would come to restore the Golden Age.

And scryer John foresaw a conjunction of *Virgo coelestis*—shod in the Dragon's-head and wreathed in the *Corona Borealis*—with *Draco* or *Serpens*, on the midnight of the winter solstice—a conjunction which would issue in the birth of a man-child, to rule the nations with a rod of iron.

But what had hitherto been presaged by portents and prodigies is finally dawning upon us. For the Orpheum shall turn the ancient dream into broad daylight. Just as a child was once born, and a son was

given, so will we witness the nativity of the *Filius Macrocosmi*.

-2-

Annabel, it's always a treat to see you!

I was wondering about you homily on opening night.

Did you enjoy it?

I wasn't sure what it all meant.

I don't say everything at once. Wait for the next few homilies.

Where did you learn about all this esoteric stuff?

I was a son of the manse. So that's how I got started.

What sort of church was it?

Oh, it was an old fashioned skreegh-me-dead affair.

Why did you leave the church?

Sunday mornings were bad enough, what with my Dad droning through his nose in a sanctimonious singsong, while all the while a bright world beckoned beyond the imprisoning prism of my stained-glass cell; but when you were further led to consider that heaven is a perpetual church service, well, the prospect was as intolerable as it is interminable.

What did your Dad preach about?

In a nutshell, it went something like this: Before the birth of time, the Ancient of Days spoke the world into being by the Word of his power—to shadow forth his fulgurating glory. And the earth was blanketed by thick clouds above and floodwaters below. And the Ancient days spoke in tones of thunder. And sheets of levin flashed out from the throne of God and the altar of heaven. And there was light. And the Ancient of Days divided the deep by raising up rose-budded summits—like the blushing desert after a flash flood; and the sun, moon and stars came forth as the Breath of the Almighty dispersed the storm clouds. And the Ancient of Days filled the seas with fish, and the air with wingéd songbirds, and the land with every beast of the field and creepy crawler. And the Ancient of Days fashioned the man from the dust of the earth, and in-breathed the breath of life; and he fashioned the woman from the man, to be the glory of the man—just as he had fashioned the man to be the image and glory of God.

And God made the man and the woman a little lower than the angels and crowned them with dominion over the work of his hands. And God planted the man and the women in a well-watered garden, where they were left free to eat of every pleasant tree, save only the tree of knowledge. But by the eternal appointment of God—in manifestation of his mercy and judgment—the man was bitten by the serpentiform seraph, and banished by God from the garden, and cursed by God to return to dust and ashes. Yet God

unveiled the distant prospect of the woman's seed, which would one day crush the Dragon's head and trample underfoot the brood of the basilisk.

And God prefigured the woman's seed—by way of the Exodus and the wilderness and the land of milk and honey; by Adam and Isaac, Moses and Melchizedek, Jonah, Jedidiah, and David; by burnt offerings and brazen serpents; by lambs and rams and red heifers; by temples and tabernacles; by Jacob's ladder, heaven's manna, and water from the rock.

And God set apart the woman's seed, and he preserved her seed throughout the ages of expectation. For when, at various and sundry times, the serpent's seed threatened to choke the woman's seed, the Lord wrought redemption and judgment by flooding flatlands and melting mountains, confounding tongues and scattering tribes, unleashing plagues, parting seas, and raining down fire and brimstone.

From henceforth, the world would be a battleground between two seeds—the Nazarenes and the Naassenes; and between two loves—the love of God and the love of man; and between two cities—a celestial and a terrestrial; and between two creeds—solafidianism and nullifidianism; and between two destinies—an eternal and an infernal. For the sons of Cush resettled upon the flood plains of Paradise. Out of Eden uprose a city, and out of Havilah—a tower.

Then, in the fullness of time, the woman's seed came down from heaven—hailed by portentous signs—to be born of a virgin, and work prodigious deeds, and die for his seed. For by sucking dry the viper's bite, he drew the poison forth from Adam's open wound, and envenomed his own bloodstream, and took his place among the vast, unnumbered dead. But the woman's seed was raised in the flesh on the first day of the week, and ascended to the Father's right hand—there resuming the glory he had with the Ancient of Days before all days.

And the battle between his seed and the serpent's seed will proceed and prolong until the harvest is ripe, and Mother Jerusalem descends on Mother Babylon, and the woman's seed returns to the vineyard with twelve legions of angels, to thrust in the sickle and reap the harvest, and tread the grape in the winepress, and distill the blood into vintage wine. Then the Tigris will water the healing tree, while the proud tower is toppled and the rubble burned with burning for everlasting.

And what's wrong with that?

It leaves out the most important part.

Which is?

In the beginning was darkness—the light came later.

And why's that such a big deal?

Don't you see? If darkness is prior to light, then that turns everything around, good and evil, being and

unbeing, God and Satan. Lucifer is both bringer of light and prince of darkness. All of philosophy and theology are contained in that primordial order.

You find all that in one little verse?

Not if you stick with the plain paper and ink. But the literal sense is only the lowest rung of the ladder, from which we rise through the anagogical and tropological rungs to reach the true and esoteric sense. And once we climb to the top we can kick the ladder aside. But the Church suppressed the true Gospel.

What's that?

The lost Gospel as handed down by the Ophites and Sethites, Cainites and catamites—the faithful prophets of old.

If it was lost, how did you come by it?

Urania revealed it to me. To me she entrusted the key of knowledge. And that is now my calling—to restore the lost, the true, and everlasting Gospel. But this is the first time you showed such an interest in the old time religion. Have you found your own vocation as well?

Oh, don't get me wrong. It doesn't make a particle of sense to me, especially all that business about the Trinity. I don't know how so many smart people can believe anything half as contradictory.

Yes, that's a common criticism. But the Trinity is really the best part of it. That's the one thing I never

outgrew. It's just a matter of adjusting your perspective. To me, the Trinity is like a folding mirror. Just compare it to the holospheric idol of the simple-minded Saracens. My entire life's work is a quest for a *coincidentia oppositorum*. Sometimes it makes me wonder if the prophets and apostles weren't right after all.

Chapter 4

Seth, did you ever take a puff on that poppy joint I gave you?

Yeah, I got high last night and had a funny dream.

Tell me about it.

All right, it went something like this: I see Dad on his deathbed. And he tells me to travel back in time to the *Paradise Terrestre* and fetch an olive branch from the tree of life

What for?

So as I can smear him with oil and restore his youth.

I see. Go on.

Okay, so I go back in time and space to the vale of Hebron, where I see a garden surrounded by a wall of fire. I hear fluted songbirds warbling over the wall. So I go round and round until I find an opening on the eastern rim. But it's guarded by a cherub with a flaming blade.

So I ask him if he'd let me fetch an olive branch. But he bars my way, saying that the oil of joy won't flow for four more millennia. However, he tells me to wait outside while he brings me something

So I peer over the gate and I follow him with my eyes. In the navel of the garden I see a well of water gushing forth a fourfold river from deep within the

hollow of the earth. At the south end I see a proud looking old oak tree. On the west bank I see an olive tree shooting up to sky, with a newborn baby nested in its crown. And over on the east bank I watch the cherub walk up to a withered apple tree—strangled dry by a python. Apples have fallen on the ground, and the cherub picks one up and brings it back to me. Then he tells me to plant the seeds over my father's grave.

What happened next?

Well, the whole scene suddenly changes. I see the children of Israel weeping by the waters of Babylon. Then a Hebrew steals into the hanging gardens and yanks off an olive branch. When the Hebrews return to Jerusalem, he plants the dry branch on Mt. Olivet, where it buds and blossoms like Aaron's rod.

Then what happened?

The scene changes again. I watch a windstorm blow through Mt. Olivet and knock down a tall tree. It's hewn into a cross and pitched on a hill outside the city limits.

What happened after that?

I woke up!

What does it all mean?

Beats me! Have you ever had a dream like that?

No, I have the same dream, night after night, but never like that.

Like what, then?

I'm always trying to get home. Sometimes it feels as if I'm pushing against a headwind, and other times as if the road is receding right front of me.

So you never get home?

I do, finally – only home is no longer my home.

What do you mean?

'Cause no one's home. The house was sold while I was out, and I'm afraid the new owner will return at any moment and drive me away as a trespasser.

What happens?

I wake up. Then it starts all over again the next night. What about you?

Sometimes I dream I'm a skin-diver. I keep swimming up to the light, but I never reach the surface. Then I sink back down, and try again, and again.

Chapter 5

-1-

My fellow Orpharions. We read in St. Matthew that Magi journeyed from the East to worship the Christchild. The Magi were learned in the ancient arts of astrology, astromancy and oneiromancy, which is why they are guided to their distant destination by dreams and prodigies.

And this hallowed precedent gave rise, in the Renaissance, to the high calling of the Christian magus—of a Merlin, Faust, Prospero, Archimago, Paraclesus or Hermes Termaximus; and it reaches back in time—back to Solomon, Simon Magus, Jannes and Jambres, and Balaam—who pronounced blessing upon the children of Israel. And from the High Middle Ages until the end of the Enlightenment, clockmakers wrought fine timepieces to track the Zodiac, the lunar phases, and the transit of Venus—while automata piped the planetary and canonical hours.

But the Church has blackened the noble name of the magus, for the Church fears any threat to her unholy hegemony. That is why I founded the Orpheum. And just as a guiding star led Casper, Melchior and Balthasar to the Prince of Peace, so now shall the

Orpheum be our *Argo Navis*, as she takes us sailing—
with the wind at our back, and Polaris ahead—on an
epiphanic odyssey.

-2-

Ecgbana?

I'm in the backyard!

What exactly are you working on?

I've plotting a garden.

What kind of garden? It doesn't look much like a
vegetable garden or a flower garden!

No, it's a Zen garden.

What's a Zen garden?

How should I describe it?—if a desert is a formless
void, a forest a formless plenity, and a landscape
garden is formal plenity, then a Zen garden is a
formal void. Does that make sense?

I guess so, sort of.

So, Annabel, what do you think?

I don't know. It's just a gravel pit. Where are you
going to put all the trees and flowers and fountains?

That misses the point. There are no trees and flowers
and fountains.

What's so great about a gravel pit?

Well, it's not *just* a gravel pit. The gravel is raked and the rocks arranged in such a way as to outline the negative space, like an empty picture frame.

But why?

Because life is like a skin lesion stretched over nothingness.

How romantic! Does your Dad approve?

He hopes that positioning the rocks a certain way will generate geomantic forces.

Is that a good thing?

If the energy is properly channeled.

Well, it least it will keep the bees away! I'm allergic to bee-stings.

Chapter 6

Annabel, how nice of you to drop by this morning.

I've never been down to the Horologium before. It's kind of spooky taking that long spiral ladder into the hollow of the earth.

This is where the old turbines used to be housed—level with the water, in the nether regions of the power plant.

What's that you're working on? It looks like a great big cuckoo clock!

It's a combination Spieluhr and hydraulus.

What's a Spieluhr?

An automated, astrological clock—like the Strasbourg clock.

What's a hydraulus.

A water organ. The hydraulus was invented in ancient Egypt by Ctesibius.

What does it do?

Once I extract the experimental data that you and Zoe, Seth and Ecgbana are working on, I'll input the monomelody on the keyboard. And that, in turn, will calibrate the clock to realign with the invisible spheres above.

What will happen then?

Then the *musica humana* will vibrate in sympathy with the *musica mundana* to restore cosmic harmony.

How did you get into clocks and watches and water organs, anyway?

I was fascinated by the nature of time.

What kind of time?

Every kind of time—time, times and halftime, instants, seconds, moments, minutes, hours, weeks, months, seasons, years, leap years, light-years, decades, centuries, millennia, cosmic time, kairotic time, calendrical time, sidereal time, geological time, strict time, simple time and compound time, appointed time and accepted time, set times and sundry times, lost time, clock time, block time, second time, due time and dreamtime, first time and last time, daytime and nighttime, summertime and wintertime, foretime, meantime and endtime, wartime, peacetime and pastime, seedtime and harvest, Sabbath rest and Jubilee, septennium and millennium, time travel, time dilation, time-lag, time and chance, time and judgment, time and eternity, the passage of time, the arrow of time, the signs of the times, the shortness of time and the fullness of time, once and for all time, memory, past necessity, future contingency, synchronicity, diachronicity, anachronicity, simultaneity, imminence, rhythm, rubato, ritornello, retrocausation, precognition, history, prehistory, linear history, cyclical history, the life-cycle, the specious present, the first day and the

seventh day, creation and consummation, meridiem, post meridiem and ante meridiem, A-time and B-time, a time to live and a time to die, a time to love and a time to hate, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to win and a time to lose. Time is untamable. Either you've got too much or too little! When you're young, time's your friend—but when you're old, time's your foe!

When did you become so interested in time?

It went back to childhood, what with the church year and organ music and movable feast days. There's a lot about time in the Bible and the Christian outlook. Music is metrical, and music is made by bending time and folding space into a floating mobile of sculpted air.

Chapter 7

-1-

My fellow Orpharions. The world has fallen asleep. The whole globe is stiff with sleep paralysis. The Church dated the Fall of man to the third chapter of Genesis, when Adam and Eve heeded the serpent, and ate from the tree of knowledge, and were cursed to return to dust and ashes. But the Church's timing was way off. For the Fall really took place a chapter before, when the Lord God Almighty cast Adam into a deep sleep. All the sons and daughters of Adam are only figments of his apocatastic coma. And that is why we've forgotten how to speak the *lingua Adamaica* that our formfader once uttered when he named Eve and all the beasts of the field—before falling forever asleep. But once we recover the monomelody, then that shall at last lift the family curse and resound the *harmonia mundi*. Like an alarm clock, the music of the spheres will rouse us out of our dormancy and rip away the death mask.

-2-

Dad, I have a question.

Yes, Ecgbana.

After your homily I went back and reread the Bible account.

What of it?

Didn't Adam wake up and see Eve?

If you choose to judge by the vulgar, outward form of words, then... yes. And the thin-witted masses never get past the surface sense. But a true magus must learn to divine the esoteric sense. Remember the First Law of Newtonian hermeneutics.

Which is?

To every interpretation there is an equal and opposite interpretation. That's a fundamental constant, my boy – more unexceptional than any law of nature!

Don't you ever feel that it's a tad underhanded to preach one thing in public while believing something else in private?

I know, I know! It's nearly enough to give hypocrisy a bad name!

Can't you ever be serious?

Let me assure you, my boy, that a bot mot is no laughing matter, but demands the highest pitch of discipline. Besides, the comedian is the only sane player on the stage. The straight man is never in on the joke.

Back to my question...

I'm afraid that's like asking a man if he'd run away with Helen of Troy. If he said "yes," you'd call him a cad, but if he said "no," you'd think him a prig!

Well, given *that* choice, I'd rather be a cad than a prig.

And I should hope so! The art of living lies in knowing just when to give in to a good temptation. No gentleman's education is complete without it!

But back to my question...

Really, you can be such a bore!

Maybe, but for once I'd like a straight answer.

Very well then, the secret of success is to be brazenly shameless and let everyone else be too embarrassed to say a thing. Theirs is the shame and ours is the gain!

But it sounds so unprincipled!

On the contrary, we must be scrupulously unscrupulous!

Seriously, though, don't you think you owe your supporters more of an explanation?

I owe them? Come, come, my boy! Just as you don't address your dog in Sapphic stanzas, you wouldn't waste your deeper meaning on a little herd of mooncalves. Their duty is to listen, pay, and obey!

And what is *our* duty?

Why, to show them their duty to us, naturally! I see now that I've been negligent in your moral formation.

Things have come to a pretty pass when sin is out of fashion. I really must catch up for lost time.

Going back to something you said in your homily – just how can you tell that we’re all asleep? I mean, if we *were* born dreamers or dream characters, then the dream world would seem real to us, wouldn’t it?

Yes, except that every now and then a mystic briefly wakes up. When you were young, Urania came to me and whispered in my ear and wakened me from my doleful delirium. Now I must stir the others out of their collective reverie.

How do you plan to do that?

Haven’t you been listening to anything I say! The plants and planets, animals and elements still speak the *Natur-Sprache*, for they were made before Adam was made, and they never fell asleep. By finding the monomelody we will retrieve the forgotten wisdom of the *prisca magia* and restore the *Paradise Terrestre*. Do you understand?

Yes, I know all that, but I’m never sure how much of what you say is just for public consumption. Yet if, as you insist, we’re only the stuff of dreams, and you break the spell, then won’t we go out like a candle?

No at all, for then the dream will come true!

I’m afraid that all this is just a little too airy-fairy for my constitution. I need something solid to believe in.

Ah, the innocence of youth! Funny thing about matter. Science begins by dismissing our common

sense notions of matter – such as color, taste, texture, sound, and smell – as merely “secondary” properties or subjective impressions. Then, at subatomic scales, the supposedly primary properties like extension, shape, solidity and position start to shear off as well. So what is left except our subjectivity? What began with Democritus runs out into Berkeley!

Chapter 8

So this is the Metallurgium? What do you do here?

Seth, I didn't hear you come in! Your Dad wanted me to measure the natural frequency of the seven primary metals. Each metal has its own mode, you know.

How do you do that?

First off, I have to melt down the gold, silver, quicksilver, iron, tin, lead, and copper. Of course, quicksilver already melts at room temperature. The trick is to cool it, not heat it. Then I pour the molten metals into moulds in order to form rods.

Where'd you learn to do that?

Your Dad used to make his own gem settings and watch cases.

Isn't that how you met him?

Yes, I went to his shop to get my watch repaired.

Okay, so what next?

Once I've cast the rods, I run an alternating current through them, then measure the frequency on a vibrometer; and finally chart the results on a vibrograph. After that your Dad matches them up with the seven planets and planetary motions.

Which planets?

Oh, let me see. I've got a chart some where. Here it is!
Gold = sun, silver = moon, quick-silver = Mercury,
iron = Mars, tin = Jupiter, lead = Saturn, and copper =
Venus.

Is that it?

Then he tries to factor out some LCD or whatever. I
don't know.

Sounds like you don't believe in his research
programme.

Well, I believe that there's more to life than meets the
eye. Sometimes it pokes its head through in dreams
and apparitions, prescience and coincidence, deja-vu,
and other suchlike. But I don't believe that your dad's
Cartesian number-crunching scheme will ever peel
back the veil.

Then why do you go along with him?

It pays the bills.

Weren't you working before you met him?

Yes, I used to sing at the Sheherazade.

What was that?

A nightclub—like something out of the Garden of
Allah.

The Garden of Allah?

An old movie with Boyer and Dietrich—way before
your time!

I've never heard you sing.

I used to have a high soprano, but I'm afraid that time, tobacco and tequila have transposed my flute to a bassoon!

Why did you quit your job to marry my Dad?

Oh, Kadman's such a snake-charmer! How else do you reckon he was ever able to talk all these folks out of their life savings?

So you take him for a con-man?

No, I wouldn't go that far. Your Dad's so passionate. I found that very compelling. At first I thought it was a passion for me. But now I see it was really a passion for his technocratic cult.

So you think he's the real deal?

Yes... I guess. I sometimes wonder if he's a man of principle or just a prince of bull. At times he acts like a man possessed. Is he using us, or being used?

You sound bitter. I always try to look on the bright side of life.

That's easy to say at your age. But once the anodyne of youth wears off, you won't be so glib. When I was a girl, a daisy-chain would gild my day; but after mothers and lovers leave you, they take your life and love and soul away with them into the grave. It reminds me of an old Edgar Allen Poe story about a man who was slowly sealed away, brick-by-brick, until the last shaft of light was lost, the final breath of fresh air gone, and he was walled off within a dark, lonely living entombment.

Maybe you'd be better off without him.

Who can say? Life is a series of hallways with many doors leading to other corridors. And the doors lock behind you, so that once you pass through one you can never go back and try another. But why tease, torment myself with these imponderables? All I ask is for a little patch of sun to warm myself, lizard-like, before the hoarfrost seals my eyes forever. That's another reason I left the business for your father.

What do you mean?

I used to be a night owl, but now I'm a lark.

Why?

Sleep means more to me than it used to.

Why?

Dreams are the only place left where I'm still young and my lost loved ones are still alive. Just last night I had a dream about Mother. We were picking flowers by the riverside. She used to braid my hair with wildflowers. But when I looked up at her, she vanished from view, and I awoke. I wonder when I'll find her again.

Why did you only have one kid?

Because Annabel's Dad dumped me right after she was born.

How come?

He turned out to be more of a flambeau than a beau – if you catch my drift.

I'm sorry to hear that!

It's an occupational hazard if you work in the entertainment industry.

How did you meet him, anyway?

He was my pianist.

Hmm. What's that lonesome-toned tinkling I hear?

Windchimes. After I'm done with the rods and other odds and ends, I bore them through-and-through and dangle them from the window – where the river kicks up a light breeze and sets them whistling in the wind.

Chapter 9

-1-

My fellow Orpharions. The *thema mundi* is a number, the number of man—for man is the microcosm of the macrocosm. And we, at the Orpheum, are closing in on this number. We've already found out that the monomelody is a triangular number. And that calls for wisdom. The number of man is a triangular number because it is a cipher for the tower of Babel.

Commentators traditionally construe the tower of Babel as an effort to scale the ramparts of heaven. But, as usual, they are wrong. The sons of Nimrod were men of earthbound ambition—out to make a deathless name for themselves. Such men were not in the least bit heavenly-minded.

No, the truth of the matter is that these men were stargazers and star-seers, and the ziggurat was their observatory. They were the first technocrats. What is more, the ziggurat was a microcosmic map—a starchart in stone. Far from ascending to heaven, they were bringing heaven down to earth.

But, what is more, we have further learned that the number of man is a hexagonal number. This, too, calls for wisdom. And once again takes us back to Mother Babel—and back to a very different concept of time.

The Church has corrupted our native sense of time, what with its bells and clocks and calendars, septunarian schemes and movable feast days. But the sons of Nimrod divided time by six, and their sexagesimal system still survives in sidereal time—in degrees of arc, in hours, minutes and seconds. And we—we are their heirs, heirs of the true science, of Jubal, Tubal-Cain, and Nimrod, heirs of astrology and thaumaturgy, music and metallurgy. Why, the Sabbath itself takes its name for the Hebrew word for Saturn.

Finally, and foremost, we have learned that the number of man is a symmetrical number. And so it had to be, for symmetry is the super-glue that cements the elementary rudiments of the world, from roses and rose windows, sine waves and sound waves, quasicrystals, polycrystals, and rimed crystals, snowflakes and sunflowers, birdsong and whalesong, beehives and seashells, starfish, spiderwebs and spiral galaxies, to the double helix and triple fugue.

-2-

I've never been in your bedroom before.

You're the first one, besides Mom—that is. What do you think?

I guess it's what I expected.

What's that supposed to mean?

It has a girly-girl touch to it – what with all the frilly pink stuff.

I suppose you and your brother's room is chock-full of football trophies and racing car posters and pin-ups of scantily-clad females?

Who said they were clad in anything?

Boys are so disgusting! You only love us for our bodies.

So?

How'd you like to be treated like a piece of meat?

I thought you'd never ask!

Men are hopeless!

Your window commands a fine view of the river. And I see that you even have a little bed of wild flowers budding under the windowsill – mostly dragonroot and devil's-bit and... oh, there's a small crop of death cup nudged up against the wall. I'll have to gather some.

Why?

My dad's been asking about it.

What for?

It's a hallucinogen – but noxious in larger quantities.

Whatever!

Don't you find it stuffy in here? Why don't we open the window and let in the fresh scented air.

The window doesn't open.

Is it broken?

No, it's nailed shut.

I can jimmy it open in nothing flat.

No, don't!

Why not?

I prefer it that way. It keeps out the germs and ill-humors of the night. The old power plant is drafty enough without a freezing breeze from an open window.

Have it your way, but I 'd rather not see what I can't smell or stroke. Better a wall than a window. That way you never know what you're missing.

Better not to catch your death of cold!

What are all these figurines on the windowsill?

Oh, that's my glass menagerie.

Quite a bestiary! What all have you got here? Let's see... there's a bear, a dove, a dragon, and a unicorn... no, make that two unicorns—and a little flock of sheep. I hope they all get along. Otherwise, the bear might munch on the sheep and the dragon might barbecue the bear!

I assure you, they're very well-behaved little beasts.

Hmm! This one's got a wild-eyed appearance! What do you call it?

A basilisk!

Looks like a lab experiment gone awry! And what's the name for this thing?

A tetramorph.

Why's it called that?

Because it has four faces. Swivel it around and you'll see the head of a man, a lion, a bull, and an eagle.

And this monstrosity?

An amphisbaena.

Ugh! And what you do call this Baphometric beast?

A satyr.

Yikes! This here is the most grotesque animal of all!

Which one? Oh, that's an ashtray, silly!

Why do you collect these trinkets?

When I wake up in the morning, the first thing I do is to sit up in bed and stare at them as they glisten like rainbows; and I imagine what it would be like to live in another world—a world with dragons and unicorns and other suchlike. Indeed, it almost feels as though I were remembering rather than imagining—like when you just awaken out of a dream, and your mind is still floating between two worlds.

More like a nightmare! Why don't you have any real pets?

The birds are messy enough! I never have to clean up after my figurines.

Chapter 10

-1-

Hey Dad, what are you working on?

Well, Seth, at the moment I'm processing Annabel's experimental data.

How do you do that?

I had her record some samples of birdsong. I've run the results through an oscilloscope and charted the intervals. Now I need to digitize the information and extract a signature theme.

And that's it?

No, after I've collated the samples of bird-song, I then compare them with data from the vibrating rods and the seven planetary motions.

What are you driving at?

The trick is to find a common pattern in the intervals, inversions, variations and transpositions of bird-song—a pattern which is, in turn, common to vibrating rods and orbiting planets.

What's the point of the planetary motions? I never got that.

It's like this, Ecgbana. They generate the seven harmonies.

Which are what?

That's based on the division of a vibrating string. The octave is a 1:2 ratio; the fourth, 3:4; the fifth, 2:3, and so on.

You say there are seven in all?

Yes, the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and octave.

That's only five.

Not if you throw in the major and minor intervals.

Hmm, how do you calculate the harmonic interval of a planet?

Either from the ratio between its aphelial and perihelial orbit, or between its aphelial orbit and another planet's perihelial orbit.

Like a duet?

Yes, although it could run all the way up to a septet if the conditions were just right.

How often does that happen?

Once on *anno mundi* and once more on Doomsday.

And the orbits really line up that way?

No, it's subtler than that. The harmonies are *encoded* in the planetary motions. You have to perform a series of symmetry operations to detect and decrypt

the hidden proportions. I'm also working on a conversion table.

With all due respect, isn't this on the same level as astrology and numerology?

What do you think music is, if not another name for numerology? Remember when you both were boys—how I taught you math by using dominoes and polyominoes, tiling and tessellation?

Yea, that was fun!

More than fun, it goes to show the power of symmetry operations in unlocking the inner affinities of nature and number.

And if you succeed, then what?

If we could recreate the cosmic septet under controlled laboratory conditions, then that would restore to us the key of the *prisca magia* that was lost in the Fall.

Pardon me for asking this, but you don't really believe all that mumbo-jumbo about musical spheres and the long-lost *Lingua Adamaica*, do you? That's just part of the PR campaign, right?

No... not literally! But that's because there's a tacit or intuitive aspect of experience that cannot be ensnared in our spatiotemporal fishnet. Yet what you've got to grasp, Seth, is that mythology is more like a recipe than a menu. It's a way of recreating an ineffable experience. Remember that the Greeks were at once the most mythic and scientific of men. Indeed, the

prisca magia was the midwife and wetmother of modern science; it was witchery that mothered medicine, astrology—astronomy, and alchemy—chemistry.

How can unreason give birth to reason?

Reason is servant to the senses.

What do you mean?

Man's regal reason is only a footman for his flesh. All his art and science are framed to fetch a new brood of playmates for his restless eyes, ears, and appetites.

But if that's what you meant all along, why didn't you just say so in your inaugural address?

It doesn't pay to tell the rabble too much, and a dash of rat-rhyme never hurt fund-raising. Remember that the Roman Church went into steep decline right after it ditched the Latin Mass.

Isn't that a mite Machiavellian?

Ah, but you see, I'm only Machiavellian when it serves my purpose. That makes all the difference!

Don't you fear for your reputation?

Fame may be better than infamy, but I'd rather be infamous than obscure.

Why?

You can go broke on respectability, but notoriety will play to a sell-out crowd.

But what about that other stuff, like Urania?

Well, Ecgbana, whether we call it Urania, the Oversoul, *anima mundi*, collective unconsciousness, or simply “God,” these are only so many metaphors for naming the emergent consciousness of the cosmos as it crosses the threshold of sentience and sapience in its inexorable evolution towards a common Mind.

What we call “God” is beyond being and knowing, naming and numbering, good and evil, attribute and action, word and will. God is a dazzling darkness and deafening silence. Pseudo-intellectuals dismiss ritual and liturgy as so much mumbo-jumbo and hocus-pocus. But the purpose of chants and mantras and magic incantations was never to speak the truth, but to conjure up the unspeakable by inducing an altered state of awareness whereby the ineffable and incomprehensible are immediately apprehended. Mystics of every stripe have regularly resorted to spiritual exercises and psychosomatic techniques that lift the veil of perception and peer at reality in the raw.

It seems to me that you’re theism amounts to atheism.

You’re catching on, my boy!

Doesn’t seem very orthodox.

On the contrary, nothing is more orthodox than apophatic theology. Atheism is just another name for the *via negativa*, a theology of the alpha privative. God and not-God are indiscernable, you see.

So what are you saying—that the sensible world is only a phantasm?

More of a mirror.

A mirror of what?

Of God.

Why does God need a mirror?

To see himself.

But why does he need to see himself?

To know himself. Creation is an echo of God, like a sonogram. If you'd never seen your own reflection, you'd lack a self-image.

But even if that were so, why do we need to penetrate the veil of perception? Even if the world is an illusion of sorts, I'd rather make love to a beautiful illusion than an old crone in hair curlers!

Easy for you to say at your age. But a fatal illusion—like a moth drawn to candlelight. When you're young, time is your friend; but when you're old, time is your foe. In the midst of life we are in death, as men condemned—living in a sliver of space between the falling axe and the chopping-block. In this godless world we huddle together for a little warmth, sharing a common bed and sleeping on the sly as every night the Angel of death descends to snatch our nearest bedfellow, and bear his screaming soul into the darkness that knows no dawn. For the tyranny of time is the all-consuming acid that dissolves kings

and kingdoms. Men try to trap time, cage and contain it in little eddies and pockets, in cave paintings and cuneiform blocks, photographs and phonographs. Lost, like Petra, in the smothering sands of time, we scrawl graffiti in forgotten tongues one time the *lingua franca* of mankind. Myth and mysticism leave faint footholds in the universal solvent of time. But if we can escape the curse of time, abolish it once and for all, then the bondage of corruption will be reversed.

And how, again, are we going to pull that off?

The monomelody shall supply the *cantus firmus* that underlies and unifies our otherwise fragmented existence.

But how do you know that there's something better behind the veil? What if you threw the curtains open only to see a monster staring back at you?

Because Urania has spoken to me.

But how do you know that Urania isn't part of the dream, the mask, the maya? That the world is convulsed by war and rumor of war because a monster lurks behind the drapery?

I guess it's a leap of faith. But if there is a beast, maybe music will tame the best, like Orpheus with the wild animals, and Adam in the Garden.

Chapter 11

-1-

My fellow Orpharions. I thought it would be nice, on such a fine summer morn, if we held our service out in the courtyard, under the swaying of the palm trees.

It is going to come about, and sooner than you suppose, that the Orpheum will to be exalted to the capital of the new world order, and all nations shall flow into it. For from the Orpheum there will issue the counsel of peace. Then they'll beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; for nation no longer will lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn of war anymore.

And you, as charter members of the Orpheum, are about to be princes in the new world order. The Orpheum is going to send you forth as vice regents to administer the new regime. You will dwell in marbled mansions and command nations.

-2-

Seth, are the fish biting?

Hey, bro, I didn't hear you sneaking up behind me!

I can see why you come here, under the nodding willow woods, as the whirlpools twirl and swirl witherward.

Yeah, just me and a few Bumblebees for company.

What are you staring at?

Just now I caught sight of your ugly mug in the Stygian stream. The reflected branches make it look like you've got horns sprouting out of your forehead!

Not a birthmark, I trust!

So, are the fish biting?

Oh, I caught a few rainbow trout. See them flopping about in the pail over there? You should try it sometime.

I already did!

What did you catch?

I once caught sight of Annabel bathing in the millstream. You should of been there, bro, to see her rising like Venus before the matutine sky – to see her there, with lips parted like parting ships, and skin rolling gold in the summer sun.

Just between you and me, what do you think of our Dad's grand vision?

To be honest, bro, I think it's a total crock! But even a madman has his lucid moments!

He seems to see himself as an instrument of high destiny.

Tell me about it! The guy struts and crows more than a midden-cock – like the Lord of the flies!

It's funny, but Dad hasn't aged a day since we were kids.

I know, it's uncanny. I once read in some old book of his that a demoniac is supposed to be immortal. Maybe there's more to Urania than a touch of tinnitus!

If so, it's a pretty high price to keep the wrinkles away. Imagine your body ambling around like a zombie while your soul is imprisoned in some dark dungeon of Acheron.

Yeah, if you believe in a soul.

What do you believe?

I'm just a momentary spark in the darkness.

You know, bro, sometime the two of us ought to take a raft down the river

Sounds like a helluva good time! We could ride the rapids, cook over an open fire, and sleep under the stars.

Of course, we'd have to embark below the drop-off.

Where does the millstream lead, anyhow?

According to the map, it loops through a chestnut nave of fanning fir trees and shedding cedar trees before forking off into four tributaries.

Chapter 12

-1-

Annabel! I figured I'd find you in the aviary.

Hi there, Ecgbana!

So many birds. What species is that?

The Solitaire. It has a real sweet song. So does the lyrebird, over there.

And what about that bright bird with the filiform feathers?

That's a Bird of Paradise.

Doesn't sound like much.

No, but I bought it because it's so pretty. Don't you think so?

I know something even nicer on the eyes.

Guys have got a one-track mind. Don't you ever think about anything else?

Can you tell me something better to think of?

What about art?

Have you ever been to the Louvre? Most art is about sex!

Okay, then, what about music?

What kind of music?

Oh, I don't know... opera, grand opera.

Did you ever sit through a Wagnerian opera? It's five hours of foreplay!

Okay, then, what about marriage?

Us? Now?

Not right away. But down the line.

The further down the line the better!

Why are you guys so resistant to marriage, anyway?

Everytime I think about getting married and starting a family, the feeling creeps over me that life is just a giant music box.

How so?

It's like when you can't get a tune out of your head. When you're a kid, you want to be a grown-up—and when you're a grown-up, you want to have kids. Is there nothing new under the sun? Is that it?

So you *don't* want to have a wife and kids?

It's not about what I want. Everyone wants the same thing. But that's the problem. I feel like we've all been locked inside this crazy old music box.

Kind of like your Dad's grand cuckoo clock?

Exactly! Like one of them automated figures that just goes round and round and pipes on time. But who's it playing for? Is there anybody out there? Is anybody

listening? It's all so... so claustrophobic. I keep feeling for the doorknob, but I can't find a handle anywhere.

-2-

Mom, do you think that Iseult-la-Belle would be a good stage name?

What on earth are you talking about, dear?

I thought I'd give showbiz a spin. I assume you still have a few friends at the Sheherazade?

Why'd you want to do that?

Well, I don't think Ecgbana and I have much of a future together. He's pretty shy on the idea of a long-term commitment.

Joy the club, dear! That's the way the male beast is wired! At best, a man is just a well-mannered animal. But if you're looking for security, you sure won't find it on the stage.

No, but it's more than that. You were always so elegant and glamorous—like a goddess. I wanted to be just like you when I grew up.

That's how every little girl feels. It's what got me sucked in! But things look a lot different on the other side of the limelight.

What's wrong with a life on stage?

To begin with, only a handful of women ever make it to the top. And it takes them so long to hit the big

time that they've only got about ten good years ahead of them. With men it's different, but for us females, the clock is always ticking!

It's so unfair!

Maybe so. But since the guys are the ones building the bars and clubs and casinos, and writing the songs, and signing the checks, we women are—in a way—loafing off their largesse.

But they get plenty in return!

Tell me about it! Art is a symbiosis of feminine inspiration and masculine aspiration. All the great art is by men, but about women! So it ought to be a pretty equitable arrangement all around, but most of the time it doesn't work out that way.

As for the rest of us—and, let's face it, sweetie, Lena Horne or Marlene Dietrich you're not!—showbiz isn't much of a life. Drooling goons with yellow teeth and tobacco breath take their cut, while what's left goes for the wardrobe. You must maintain a starvation diet, fret over crow's-feet, and pray to God you never catch cold. You've got to sing the same goddamn love song for the millionth time as if you still mean it, while drunken diners slobber and jabber through your number. When you get home at night, it's too late to tuck your little girl in bed and kiss her goodnight—because she's learned to undress herself and brush her teeth and turn out the light; and when you get up, it's too late to kiss her good morning—because she's learned to dress herself and make

breakfast and run off to school. Remember how it was?

It's coming back to me.

Look, honey, it's oh-so romantic to reach for the stars, but the only stars within reach are made of tinsel, not stardust! Why bay at the moon, like your brother's howling hound? It brings her no nearer. We flutter and die like snowflakes on hot asphalt. So content yourself with what fugitive pleasures you can snatch at here-below.

Chapter 13

-1-

My fellow Orphareons. The story of Babel preserves for us an ancestral memory of the aboriginal homophony, when all the earth spoke with one voice. And this is, of course, a figure of world peace. But it also preserves for us the aboriginal cacophony, when the world was divided by race and confounded by tongue.

Various efforts have been made to mend this situation, from Leibniz' search for a universal character to the Esperanto society. Yet all such efforts are so much fire without Pentecost.

Greek mythology has a number of arresting tales of life and death and life to come. Remember the story of Baucis and Philemon, so charmingly told by Ovid, which caused Paul and Barnabas so much grief? The aged and adoring couple were turned into intertwining trees to spare them the sorrow of one preceding the other into death. Yet, if you think about it, the love-life of a tree is decidedly limited, like initials carved in bark, so that this tale, despite its outward warmth and winsomeness, offers no hopeful prospect—even if it were real. It's appeal lies for the living—and not the dead and dying; for afterlife as an

oak or linden tree is a thing insensible to love or pain—a petrified immortality.

Then there's the sad story of Tithonus, the consort of Aurora. She implored Zeus to grant him eternal life, but neglected to ask for eternal youth, so that poor Tithonus shriveled up in a state of mummified immortality until the gods took mercy on him and turned him into a cricket.

The myth of Orpheus is my own personal favorite. I'm sure you all know the story. Orpheus was in love with Eurydice, but she is bitten by a viper, and dies. Orpheus then braves the terrors of Tartarus to rescue her. His sublime voice and harp charms Cheron, Cerberus, Minos, Persephone, and Pluto—who consents to the release of Eurydice on condition that Orpheus never once look back. Eurydice is guided by the lyre as she threads her way through black passageways, and just as Orpheus emerges from the depths of darkness into the daylight, he turns to see if she's still following him—only to watch, grief-stricken, as she vanishes from his grasp with only a one-word farewell fading in his ears.

The Orphic Mysteries became a major cult in the Greco-Roman world, and elaborated a full-blown cosmology. Clement of Alexandria kept a catalogue of the Orphic hymns, and the Church Fathers were clearly inspired by the myth of Orpheus when they invented the *descensus ad infernos* of Christ and his harrowing of hell.

The story has proven to be very appealing to playwrights and operatic composers. And it's easy to see why. Wouldn't we all wish to play the part of Orpheus? What would we not give to deliver our departed loved ones from the jaws of death?

And now the myth will soon come true. Thanks to your generous support and patient sponsorship, the Orpheum has at last hit upon the monomelody. Equipped with the dulcet tone of monomelody, you too will lead the prisoners of hope forth from darkness into light. But before you can awaken the sleepers, you must make your own descent into the Netherworld.

Come Sunday, on the return of the Dragon's-head, we will celebrate a last supper. The angel ergot which we eat, is it not the bread of angels? The death cup which we sip, is it not the cup blessing?

We will only be at peace within and without by learning to live unto death. Time may rob us of life and health and wealth, but nothing can rob us of the singular and solitary moment of death. Therein lies the inalienable dignity of each man and woman—as we render and surrender to the surpassing peace of death eternal. Hark and hear as a passing bell now summons each and everyone to our *requiem sempiternam!*

So, bro, what do you make of Dad's last sermon?

I didn't sign up for no suicide cult, I can tell you that much!

But what can we do?

Stage a takeover.

Betray our own father?

To paraphrase our father, blind devotion is a virtue in a dog, not a man!

Okay, but it's still a high stakes gamble. You'd have to find out who's on our side without tipping your hand.

I'd rather play to my enemies.

I don't get you.

Friends come and go, but a good enemy is like money in the bank.

I still don't follow.

All I mean is that a man's enemies are such a safe bet. You can plow a lot of capital into friendship without turning a profit, but the average enemy pays such princely dividends on such a miserly investment that if it isn't criminal, then it damn well should be!

Still, a power grab is a dangerous gambit. You'll have to move slowly and not overplay your hand.

Power exists to be used, and grows the more—the more it is used!

Chapter 14

-1-

Seth, such good timing! You can help your brother and me distribute the communion elements.

Where were you, bro?

Exploring the grounds.

Fill every basket with a dozen or so mushrooms, will you? Find anything interesting?

As a matter of fact, I found a grove of old growth timber at the far end of the compound.

Ecgbana, would you grab that extra box of mushrooms? There are pockets of virgin forest all over the countryside. So what's so special about that?

There was this knotted old oak tree in the middle of a clearing.

So what?

Well, for one thing, it looked like the tree I saw in my dream. Pretty spooky, huh?

What dream is that?

Oh, a dream I had. I told Ecgbana about it.

Well, I always said that oneiromancy was a channel of esoteric knowledge.

Oh, and someone's initials were carved in the trunk.

That's pretty commonplace. Before we bought the waterworks—maybe before the power plant ever existed—some love-struck teen did that to immortalize his sweetheart.

A pocketknife is the next best thing to eternity!

Yeah, except for the fact that this tree is petrified. So it had to happen way, way back when.

Now that *is* puzzling. What were the initials?

They were hard to make out because the bark had started to grow back before it turned to stone.

A rubbing or plaster casting might bring them out. Perhaps I'll take a look myself before nightfall.

I thought you wanted to set up the service.

It can wait. You had a premonition that turned out to be true. These things mustn't be ignored.

-2-

So Seth. Where did you find it?

On the southern boundary of the compound—over by that stand of boxwood and bellflower.

Ouch!

What?

I just stumbled over a branch, that's all!

Be careful you don't sprain an ankle in the underbrush—they don't call it a thicket for nothing!

Okay, here we are!

From a distance I thought this was just a wild grove, but up close it looks like an overgrown orchard. Seems familiar, somehow.

Yeah, that's what I thought as well. Kind of creepy! What about you, Seth?

No, doesn't ring a bell.

Make a rubbing and show it to me.

Voila! What does it say? What does it mean?

Good God! Whatever possessed me?

Huh?

Come, we have to hurry back before I forget. I must tell...

-3-

...I don't know how Mark and I'll cope if Dad doesn't pull through.

Didn't you lose your sister?

Yes, my sister Jemima.

I forget her age.

She was five and I was four.

You were so young when she passed away. How well do you remember her?

My mother gave me a heart-shaped locket with a snippet of her hair. And for years I wore it near my heart to remember her by – until the lock of hair fell out. And for years I wore the empty locket to remember her by – until I lost the locket. And then I was much distraught until the Lord brought to my remembrance something said at the graveside service.

Which was what?

She was a fading flower.
Heaven-lent for just an hour;
Transplanted hence to higher ground,
Where the Sun of Righteousness abounds,
With wingéd-healing power.

And then I was much settled in my soul.

Why's the monitor acting up?

I don't know for sure. Mark, have the nurse page Dr. Morgenstern.

Evelyn, What happened?

I was watching the monitor when his EEG spiked for a few moments and he began to mumble something.

Did you catch what he said?

His speech was slurred, but it sounded like something about the “Orpharians” and the “Dragon’s-head.”

Do you know what that means?

No, I haven’t a clue!

Well, we must make allowance for his delirium. So that’s only to be expected.

Is it a good sign?

Patients in his condition may have moments of semi-lucidity when they almost break through. But it’s still too early to say in his case.

BEULAH LAND

Chapter 1

...another year, another month, another day and hour come by. We gather together at St. Cecilia's this morning to celebrate Advent Sunday. Advent marks the Christian New Year. There is a difference between *chronos* and *kairos* – time and season. *Chronos* is linear, *kairos* is cyclical. In the Garden, the life of man was ordered by the Sabbath; in the Promised Land, by feast days; and in the Church, by the life of Christ.

The Mosaic calendar was septimal in its divisions and multiples—from the weekly Sabbath to the Year of Jubilee. But the church year enfolds the old, for our Lord arose on the eighth day, inclusive of the first. This is why we observe the *octave* of Eastertide. And when the New Jerusalem descends, the sun and moon no longer shall shine, for then the glory of God and light of the Lamb will illumine the city of God.

So the Christian view of history isn't strictly cyclical or linear, but symmetrical—consisting in repetition with variation; for mere sameness is numbing, while sheer variety is maddening. By being pitch dark, hell is a place of unendurable duration, for there there are no divisions of day and night, light and shade, to relieve the interminable passage of time, but only black infinitude in boundless time and space.

So when does the Christian New Year begin? The answer depends on how far back we take the

question. For a new year supposes an old year, and a beginning without beginning.

On the church calendar, Advent season takes place in the month of November, as a period of preparation for Christmastide. So Advent is an annual season that dates from the month of November.

But we can take the question back a step. For Advent commemorates a past expectation. So when was the first Advent? As my eyes take in the Madonna lily, over there on the altar, my thoughts naturally travel back to the Blesséd Virgin. When the angel Gabriel appeared to the mother of our Lord, his announcement forecast the first Christmas. So Advent dates from the Annunciation.

But we can take the question back another step. For the angel was sent to Mary in the “sixth month.” The sixth month of what, you ask? The sixth month of Elizabeth’s term. And inasmuch as John the Baptist was the forerunner and herald of the Christ, Advent dates from his conception.

But we can take the question back yet another step. For the Baptist was an antitype of Elijah. And his birth was presaged some four centuries before by Malachi—the seal of the Prophets. So the expectation of Messiah dates from the Babylonian captivity. Indeed, the Advent hymn we sang this morning—“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here”—hearkens

back to that black chapter in Israel's history. So Advent dates back before the Intertestamental times.

But we can take the question back still further. When Gabriel tells Mary that she would conceive and bear a son, this is a paraphrase of Isaiah's prophecy about the Immanuel Child—long before Malachi and before the Exile. So Advent dates from the Monarchy.

But we can take the question back even further. When Gabriel says that the Spirit shall "overshadow" Mary, this recalls the descent of the Shekinah upon the tent of meeting in the wilderness. Consider, for a moment, just what such an image intimates. The Christchild will fill his mother's womb in the same way that Yahweh once suffused the tabernacle. This reminds us, does it not, of how John begins his Gospel? Unlike Matthew and Luke, John doesn't open with a birth-narrative. Instead, he tells us that the "Word became flesh and camped among us, and we have seen his glory." So Advent dates from the wilderness wandering.

But we can take the question back at least one more step. For John tells us that the Word was with the Father "in the beginning". This, of course, alludes to the beginning of the world, recorded in the first verse of the first book of the Bible. Indeed, Genesis and John share a kindred motion in the division of light from darkness and exodus out of darkness and into the light. In the beginning was God, the God of light, and there was evensong and matins. So Advent dates from the first day of creation.

But we can take the question back a final step. For the beginning of the world was not the beginning of the Word. The Word was already with the Father in the beginning. The Word was with the Father in glory before the world was made, and was slain before the foundation of the world. So Advent dates from the dateless decree of God.

There was never then a time before the expectation of Advent which we gather here and now to celebrate and commemorate. Advent is a timeless time for all time; for Advent is coeternal with the very life of God—a life which he condescends to communicate to his people. And so the season of Advent is a feast for the hour and a feast for the ages—always awaiting and always arriving, coming and come, past, passing, and impassable.

Just as the idle dial of Ahaz shot forth backward-casting shadows, the ever-turning spheres shadow forth sweet seasons of Advent and Nativity, Solemnity and Epiphany, Ash Wednesday and Thaborion, Holy Week and Ascension Day—by the motive power of the Prime Mover, with whom is no variation or shadow of turning.

Chapter 2

-1-

Aiken, it's such a blessing to have you back for Christmas break. Were you planning to attend the midnight service?

I don't know, Dad. When I was a boy it spoke straight to my heart. But now I feel like an outsider.

Well, son, the message hasn't changed, so it must be your heart.

Tell me, have you ever felt God's presence?

That's hard to say. Is God more or less present? No, for God is an equidistant deity—without a when or where—so that God is more immediate to me than somebody bounded by space and time.

That doesn't make much sense to me!

Remember what Augustine said about time? "I know what time is as long as you don't ask me what time is!" Does time flow like an ever-rolling stream—in passage without persistence? But how do I tell which is moving, the water or the boat? Or does it flicker like a motion picture—in succession without passage? But since I can't leap off the silver screen and glance back, how do I tell?

Maybe we're dead movie stars up on the silver screen—just a shimmer of sepia on celluloid.

Well, that's a tad pessimistic! My point was only that it's hard to say what time is without moving in a circle. By the same token, God is not the sort of being that you and I can project onto a big screen, for the Lord is the light of the world, and "in his light we see light." The world is a shadow of God, and our grasp of God is a shadow of the world.

I guess that makes sense, but it's still pretty roundabout.

That's the point! God is everywhere and nowhere. In a great painting, every brush-stroke betrays a master touch, yet you won't find the painter within the pigment. So God's presence is at once evasive and pervasive. As the Psalmist put it, "his path went through the sea, but his footprints went unseen."

We seem to be chasing down metaphors of metaphors, like trying to overtake the setting sun. It's all too ethereal.

Ethereal? Folks often ask me how our Risen Lord was able to reappear in the Upper Room. Was he some sort of phantom? I answer, how can an oar pass through water or an eagle through the air? Not by being insubstantial, but more substantial than the medium.

How do you know it's not a dream?

And if it were? Some dreams come true, you know! Adam dreamt of Eve, and when he awoke, why – there she was! Have you ever had a lucid dream?

Of course!

To a dreamer, the sensible world is invisible; and to a waker, the dream world is invisible. To a dream dweller, the firm contours of our walking world would be an abstraction, privation, negation. To a dream dweller, the insubstantial stuff of Nod is the only immediate and ultimate reality. And yet a lucid dreamer can intuit another world beyond the dream. But how would a dreamer explain to a waker the sensed presence of the outside world from inside the dream?

Dreams! That reminds me. I once had a peculiar dream.

What was it, son?

I was caught up to heaven, where I saw a seven-tiered tiara of the underworld encircling the upper world encircling the angels encircling the elders encircling the seraphim encircling the rainbow encircling the throne.

I envy you! I often feel as if I'm trapped inside a lucid dream. I apprehend an unseen realm beyond, but it lies just out of reach. I'm trying to wake up, to shock myself awake, but every door I open leads me back into the dream. I'm hoping that someone will shake

me awake, and when I awake I'll be blessed to see his likeness.

I know the feeling. But why doesn't God put his name up in lights? That would be so much simpler and more direct.

I guess that depends on how you look at nature. If language is a scrabble-board of dead metaphors, then nature supplies the alphabet—from the body to the stars. And just as we know the unseen soul by the revelation of the spoken word, so day after day pours forth speech. Remember that, for King David, the starry sky *was* a divine billboard! Some believers, it is true, are favored with envoys from eternity—auditions and apparitions, dreams, premonitions and deathbed visions—but that was never promised us. He has spoken to the prophets. But he doesn't talk to you and me. The walk of faith is a lifelong vigil in time and pilgrimage in space to a hastening and awaiting eternity. As exiles of Eden, we live in the palpable absence of a remembered presence, and thus must tune our ears to hear him speaking, not in tuneful spheres, but in the still small voice of Scripture's silent searching word; and lower our sights to see his hidden presence, not in starry ranks above, but in the inner veil of his Incarnate Word. For God has come to us in Christ. Christ is the icon of God.

I follow you, but it's like trying to board a ship at sea. If I could believe just one thing, then I could believe all the rest. But I'm standing on the dock as the ship

leaves port without me. Is there some spiritual exercise you could recommend?

Faith is not a technique, for the natural man commutes by rowboat, but the spiritual man—by sailboat.

So my situation is hopeless!

The wind blows wherever it wills, but some spots are windier than others! Here we lie stranded, as castaways, on a desert isle, until the word of God washes ashore—like a map in a bottle—with a favoring breeze by day, and a guiding star by night. So lay in a course, weigh anchor, hoist your sail, and shoot the sun—for our salvation is nearer now than when we'd first begun.

What if it never blows?

Better to die waiting on God than waiting to die a godless death.

-2-

At the opening of the service we sang “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Bethlehem was a sleepy little hamlet some seven miles south of Jerusalem in the hills of Judea. So why is this inauspicious village the birthplace of Christ? On the face of it, the reason is that Joseph had to register there for the Roman census—which Luke carefully dates to the reign of Augustus.

This, incidentally, sheds a telling light on God's historical perspective. Suetonius had lavished a whole book on the *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, and Luke is at pains to place the Incarnation in real time and space; but for him, Caesar is just handy time-marker – as the real ruler of the world is not Caesar, but Christ.

Mary accompanied her husband on this journey. Although the ninety mile trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem would have been trying on a woman in her condition, we can readily imagine how strained social relations had become as her pregnancy advanced. Even Joseph needed an angelic visitation to clarify matters to his own satisfaction, and Mary's relatives were not so favored. This may also account for why they didn't put up with Joseph's family. So we can well understand why Mary didn't wish to be stranded and abandoned at a time like this. Better to give birth in a stable, on a bitter cold night in the bare Judean hill-country, than be left behind in the hostile environs of Nazareth.

All this was a sore trial and hardship. Yet that is often the way with providence. In order to magnify his almighty mercy and wisdom, God works by beggarly means; for some souls are better preserved in honey, but others in brine; yet is his grace sufficient for each – by a surpassing power made perfect in mortal weakness. This is one the ways he has of applying a flying buttress to our shaky lives. And by a multitude of providential impressions, he is slowly and stealthily and steadily imprinting his presence on the

fallow canvas of our hourly walk and inmost heart. The overall composition can only be perceived in retrospect. Yet faith is able to see into the unseen distances ahead, and just as the dove brought back an olive branch, so the eye of faith goes before to fetch an earnest of the harvest-glory to come.

So we ask again, why is this the birthplace of Christ? We supplied the immediate reason. But a deeper answer lies in the fact that long before Bethlehem was the birthplace of Christ, it had been the birthplace of David. And Bethlehem was also the site of David's coronation.

So often in Scripture, we cannot go forward until we go backward. Jewish readers would take the hint right away. God had cut a covenant with David and his house. Christ was born in Bethlehem because he is heir to the Davidic throne.

Why is the newborn is "wrapped in swaddling cloth and laid in a manger"? Because his parents were poor, you say? And that is true as far as it goes. But there was a grander design in play, for his birth previews his death, and his cradle the grave, when Jesus would one day be "wrapped in linen cloth and laid in a tomb."

Why is the birth of Christ witnessed by the shepherds? Once again, this draws attention to the humility of their circumstances. But a deeper answer lies in the fact that King David had been a shepherd boy.

Why is Christ born of a virgin? Here we see sacred history round out the circle. If Eve was taken straight from the First Adam, then the Last Adam is taken straight from Mary – as the woman’s seed and seed of promise come to pass.

And why did a chorus of caroling angels herald the Savior’s birth? Because the angels would one day herald his Resurrection. And so our Lord’s life is bounded at both ends by an angel-tongued and seraph-sung *cantata da chiesa*. In heathendom, the host of heaven were worshiped as gods; but in Scripture, the host of heaven were worshipers of God. The music of the spheres was a verbless, voiceless, noiseless form; but the saints and angels praise their God in hymns and anthems, magnificats and canticles, rhapsodies, psalmodies, doxologies and epithalamies of audible and laudable thanksgiving.

John Bunyan relates the case of a Christian on his deathbed:

As he lay drawing on, the woman that looked to him thought that she heard music, and that the sweetest that ever she heard in her life, which also continued until he gave up the ghost. Now, when his soul departed from him the music seemed to withdraw, and to go further and further off from the house, and so it went until the sound was quite gone out of hearing.

So let us swell the first noel as we join our voices with the heavenly choir in the harmony of their praises for the multitude of his graces. And may their sleepless song ever beckon us heavenward and homeward to the Father of spirits and the God of all flesh.

Chapter 3

Why do we celebrate the Feast of circumcision? Certainly no other incident more forcibly underscores the frank humanity and manhood of Christ. Not only was he made man, but made *a* man. To be human is to belong to particular time and place, sex and race.

But why did God command the circumcision of Abraham's posterity? Why did baptism supplant circumcision? Why is the Old Testament so obsessed with genealogies? And why did Matthew and Luke both record the genealogies of Jesus?

Luke's genealogy goes back to Adam. On the face of it, Matthew's genealogy stops with Abraham, but this is deceptive, for the wording of the opening verse—"the book of the genealogy"—also alludes to the genealogy Adam in the Greek Old Testament. So both genealogies reach back to the forefather of mankind.

And this takes its rise with the portent and promise of the woman's seed—counterpointed by the serpent's seed. Adam was sown in full leaf, but felled by the Tempter. Yet there was within his stump a green, protevangel seed. Firmly planted in the navel of the earth, the seedling rose and grew until its crown was brushing up against the crenellated hood of heaven, and lying visible from the far ends of the earth. Its healing leaves were lovely, and its produce perennial. The beasts of the field found shade under its bough,

and the birds of the air nested in its bower, while all flesh was fed from its abundant yield

But at its base a wild vine sprang up and twined around the trunk and upper limbs, bearing poison grapes and bitter vintage—issuing in the misbegotten brood of Caines cygne—the Nephilim and Anakim, Henochii, Androgyni and Cynocephali. Yet God caused sun and rain to fall alike upon the tree and the vine, for the sake of the tree and its holy seed of promise.

So we have, in the whole of history, two seeds, two humanities, two intertwining trees—the one branching off from Adam, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Judah, Caleb, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David, Solomon, and Joseph; the other forking off from Abaddon, Cain, Lamech, Jubal, Tubal-Cain, Magog, Canaan, Nimrod, Balaam, Ishmael, Esau, Reuben, Dan, Pharaoh, Ahab, Antiochus, Haman, and Herod.

The Jesse Window—over there in the north transept—illustrates this theme, as we see a stem rising from the loins of Jesse and flowering into the *fleur-de-lised* figure of Christ. Such a scene was suggested by Isaiah's oracle about "a shoot springing forth from the stem of Jesse." And in Medieval lore, the Holy Rood Tree was traceable to the tree of knowledge.

When I was once at Rouen, I noticed that the Jesse Window there took the form of a rose window with Christ at the hub, from whence the kings of Judah

fanned out into a six-petalled blossom. And that, indeed, encapsulates the story of Scripture, for all of history orbits round about the reeling axletree of Christ—as the Ensign of the nations, and glory of Israel.

Chapter 4

-1-

Today is Epiphany Sunday. In the Western Church, Epiphany commemorates the visitation of the Magi; but in the Eastern Church, the baptism of our Lord. Since both events are signal episodes in the life of our Lord, and hallowed in the memory of his Church, I'll be preaching on each event. For Mattins, I'll preach on the journey of the Magi and the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. Then, for Evensong, I'll be preaching on the baptism and temptation of our Lord.

A year or so after the first Christmas, Magi arrived in Jerusalem to pay honor and homage to the newborn king. The Magi were once a priestly caste of Media, in upper Persia, having descended in time and place from the sons of Japheth, as we read in the Table of Nations.

But the title was applied more widely in the Roman era. To Matthew's Jewish readers it would instantly evoke the Chaldeans of Daniel. So after some three millennia, the ancient benediction of Noah at last came to pass as the tribe of Japheth now dwelt in the tents of Shem.

How did the Magi learn about the birth of Christ? Magi were star-seers and dream-diviners. As such,

they were alert to celestial portents and prodigies, as well as oracular dreams, which figure in Matthew and Daniel alike.

Jeremiah also informs us that the Chief Magus was present at the sack of Jerusalem, and when the Babylonian Exile was over with, some Jews opted to remain behind. They developed into a major center of Jewish life and learning. This is where the Bavli was written. So the Magi could have consulted the Jews of Babylonia, as they do with the Jews of Jerusalem. And, indeed, their question about the “rising star” echoes the ancient oracle of Balaam, in the Greek Old Testament, about “a star arising out of Jacob.” So Word and sign go together, as the Word delimits the sign while the sign confirms the Word.

The larger point is not where the Magi came from, but what purpose they serve in the providence of God. Some have treated this incident as a divine endorsement of astrology, while others take it to be an act of divine accommodation. But all this misses the point. We must ever remember to read these stories through Jewish eyes. In this account, Jesus is another Moses, and Herod – another Pharaoh. Just as Pharaoh visited a pogrom on the Jewish boys, Herod is visiting a pogrom on the boys of Bethlehem. Just as Pharaoh sought to slay Moses, thereby evicting him from the land, Herod seeks the life of Christ and thereby drives the Holy Family from the land. Just as an angel told Moses when to return, an angel tells Joseph when to return.

So where do the Magi fit in this scheme? Remember the magicians in the court of Pharaoh? Although they witnessed the Plagues of Egypt, Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses and the God of Israel. But the Magi, when they witness the finger of God, do not resist Jesus, but seek him out and worship him, not only as the king of the Jews, but as their very own Lord and sovereign. For Jesus is far greater than Moses, and the fulfillment of all that Moses foreshadowed and Israel prefigured.

As the Creator of the world, God never bends to the creature's will, but bends the creature's will to his own. God assigned to the sun, moon and stars their varied stations—not only as extraordinary signs and portents, but also as ordinary signs marking the divisions of the work day, and the Sabbath day, creation days, feast days and day of the Lord, seedtime and harvest, new moons and harvest moons, years of bondage and years of Jubilee. And God inscribed the church calendar on the skies—from the star of Bethlehem and eclipse on Good Friday to the falling stars on Doomsday. Astrology, astrolatry and astromancy are dark arts because they *reassign* to the stars an autonomous and idolatrous import. But just as the morning star precedes the split-lidded dawn, so the star of Bethlehem portends the Sun of Righteousness. And so may the dayspring from on high again arise within our darkened hearts and banish the shadows.

In answer to the Magi's query, the scribes turned to the oracle of Micah, rounded out by the Lord's coronation of David and restoration of his house, for "out of Bethlehem of Judea there would come a governor—whose origins were of the ages of the ages—to shepherd the flock of Israel." Messiah's birthright goes back to David and David's Lord.

Herod's reaction admirably illustrates the deranged logic of the damned. On the one hand, Herod is a Bible-believer of sorts, for he fully credits the oracle. On the other hand, he then sets about to frustrate its fulfillment, thus driving the Holy Family from the Promised Land into the former land of bondage. Yet Herod is hardly the first man to imagine that he could outpace the footfalls of his fate. For I'm reminded of Ahab, who was cut down by a not-so stray arrow.

But by a divine turn of events, it is these very Magi—though once estranged from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, and without hope of God in all the world—who journey to greet the glory of his rising with gifts of Sabaeen gold and the tribute of Tarshish, while Herod and the chosen race miss the day of visitation.

-2-

Honey, I need to go a little early to open up the church.

Papa, can I go with you?

You're not coming with your mother?

I had something to ask you about.

Very well.

This morning, as you were preaching on the Holy Family, it made me think... You and Mom have been together so long. What's it like?

That's rather sudden! Is there some secret boyfriend I don't know about?

Don't be silly!

Well, that's a relief!

Back to my question...

Yes, back to your question. Oh, I don't know. I suppose it reminds me of that Mendelssohn cello sonata I heard you and your mother rehearsing a while back.

What do you mean?

The timbre of married life is much akin to the percussive touch of the piano part, which—like the bracing sound of autumn leaves underfoot—balances and blends with the sunset tone of the cello line. And over the years, small ensemble players not only learn to sight-read a score, but to sight-read each other, so that their voices merge in a sum oversumming the parts. Predestination transposes this ensemble to a higher key. God is the composer and conductor, while we are his musicians and choristers.

But what makes a marriage work?

It's like tending a garden. You plough it with your heart, seed it with your faith, and wet it with your tears—but God gives the increase. It's like the life of prayer.

What do you mean?

People are bothered by unanswered prayer. But prayer is a seasonal growth. You sow it in faith, water it with hope. You never know what days it will flower forth, but that's part of the beauty of the thing—to be surprised by a sudden bud and sweet, soft-colored blossom. And if you hadn't planted the flower in the first place, you'd never see it burst into bloom. Better seasons of summer and winter than winter year round.

Chapter 5

-1-

Tonight we commemorate the baptism and temptation of our Lord. The baptism of Christ offers a snapshot of the Trinity. For as the Father bears witness from heaven, the Son prays on earth, while the Spirit descends, dove-like, from heaven to earth to illustrate the charism of the Lord's Anointed. Some sunny morning you should look at the rose window, there above the eastern portal—look at that opal glass cameo of a dove descending, with silvered wings and gilded pinions, from a fiery cloud to the prayerful figure of our Lord; while over in the crossing lies the labyrinth—as an emblem of the wilderness wandering and theater of testing. And if your eyes follow the angle of the light, the rosy scene above merges with the labyrinth below, so that, for a few fleeting moments of the day, our cold stone sanctuary is animated by the quickening beams to embody a lively parable and luminous momento of Gospel history.

Many people find the Trinity confounding, but I imagine that the Father, Son and Spirit inhere and cohere with the same effortless grace as the tessellated tune of a three-part fugue for organ. Indeed, that is why I asked my wife Evangeline to play Bach's *St.*

Anne Prelude & Fugue, for it supplies us with a tone-poem of the Trinity, as the interplay of theme and variation exemplifies the ageless, inner rondo of the divine life. And if you take another look at the rose window, you'll see the same theme in its subtle iteration of the nonagonal rosettes.

What is more, we not only see a symmetry of persons, but a symmetry of purpose; for those the Father chose, the Son redeemed, and the Spirit renewed. So the Trinity is not a logical cacophony, nor a unitarian monody, but a sublime polyphony, which is why we inscribe the archangelic Trisagion on glass-panes and organ strains—for the Trinity is at once the *terza rima* of the church and of the world.

But all this still leaves unanswered the question of why our Lord would submit to a baptism of repentance when he was sinless? Why did he undergo temptation when he was impeccable? And in order to answer such questions, we need to see two things at once.

For the history of Jesus is the history of Israel: just as Israel was once guarded and guided by an eagle-pinioned providence in the waste howling wilderness, so the Spirit descends as a dove upon our Lord and drives him into the desert; just as Israel once forded the Jordan, so does our Lord; just as Israel then wandered the wilderness in fortyfold measure, so does our Lord; just as Israel once hungered and thirsted in the wilderness, so does our Lord; just as

Israel was once tempted to commit idolatry in the wilderness, so is our Lord.

And in his first and following replies, our Lord quotes from Moses as he recounted the wonderful redemption of Israel from Egypt, and the gracious giving of law at Sinai, and the providential preservation of Israel in the badlands, in preparation for the conquest of Canaan, now that Israel had come to the end of her forty-year pilgrimage, and was standing on the outskirts the Promised Land—lest she should revert to bondage by emulating her heathen neighbors.

So history repeats itself—but with a difference. Israel was tempted many times, and failed for as many times; three times does the Devil tempt our Lord, and three times does our Lord prevail. Likewise, Israel was *tempted*, as well as our Lord, but the *Tempter* did not show himself to Israel as he does to our Lord.

We don't know what form the Devil took when he appeared to our Lord. As we've seen, the temptation of Christ in the wilderness replays the temptation of Israel in the wilderness, which, in turn, replays the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden. The name of the Tempter is a pun, for the word for "snake" is the same word used by Balaam to put a hex on Israel. The angel who opposes Balaam is named "Satan." The same sword-drawn angel recalls the cherubim who guard the Garden. The brazen snake, as well as the "fiery serpents" or "seraph-serpents," recall the Tempter and the fiery cherubim.

The talking donkey recalls the talking snake. Just as Adam and Eve committed apostasy in the Garden, Israel committed apostasy in the wilderness. And the devil here hopes to repeat his triumph. But this time he's up against a very different protagonist indeed!

The Devil is a conjurer and shapeshifter who runs rapidly through one alias after another: Thor, Tlaloc, Teufel, Sophia, Zeus, Asmodeus, Lucifer, Manitou, Azazel, Mephisto, Moroni, Ra, Allah, Odin, Isis, Apollyon, Witherwind, Mithra, Maumet, Baphomet, Termagant, Tryphon, Metatron, Baal, Belial, Brahma, the Beast, the Antichrist, the Red Dragon, the Old Serpent, the Prince of Darkness, and another names unnumbered. But by whatever guile or disguise, you can always smell the sulfur under his breath!

In his first temptation, the Devil solicits our Lord to turn stones into loaves. And he appeals to the divine sonship of Christ, picking up on the baptism of our Lord, where the heavenly voice owned him as his very own Son, which, in turn, hearkens back to Israel as the firstborn of the Lord.

For Israel had also hungered for bread in the wilderness of Sin, and there murmured against her God. And God graciously supplied manna from heaven. Yet our Lord doesn't grumble against God, but submits himself to the Father's providence. Because he *is* the Son of God, he remains the faithful Son of a faithful Father.

We must remember that, after a forty-day fast, our Lord is not so much hungry as on the very verge of starvation. And there was nothing inherently wrong with using his divine might to make bread. Indeed, he will do as much and more for others in far less distress. And yet he restrains his almighty arm and wonder-working word, for in his redemptive role he had freely chosen to close with the plight of his people by assuming their infirmities and burdens.

For that matter, it lay within his plenipotent power to unmake Satan with a single thought. Yet he declines the thaumaturgic role of a Balaam or Simon Magus. Unlike Jannes and Jambres, he is no vulgar snake-charmer. He refrains from opposing black magic with white magic, for such would be a case of Satan casting out Satan.

The specter of spiritual warfare has given rise to a vast and varied literature, ranging from such nefarious works as *The Book of Jannes and Jambres* and the *Clavicula Salomonis*, to ecclesiastical manuals like the *Malleus Maleficarum*. But our Lord instead takes shelter in a refuge common to the most modest believer, which is the simple word of God.

Let us learn from his hallowed example. For there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel, and by the humble provision of Scripture and prayer we can overcome all infernal adversity.

In his second temptation, the Devil transports our Lord to the royal porch of the Temple, overseeing a five-hundred foot plunge to the valley below. You can get the same effect if you go around to the back of the church and peer over the cliff. Just stay behind the fence!

For Israel had also thirsted for water at Rephidim, and there she tempted God. And God graciously supplied water from the rock. Yet our Lord doesn't demand a sign from his Father, for that would be an act of impious presumption. Indeed, Lucifer fell by exalting himself, whereas our Lord shall be exalted by demeaning himself.

People often ponder how a holy angel could fall so far—or fall at all. Perhaps a clue can be found in the fact that Satan takes on a prosecutorial role in Scripture. He is the accuser and adversary of Zechariah and Job, Israel and the brethren. Could it be that the Devil is a demoralized moralist? Could it be that he prized the justice of God more than his mercy?

No one is more scrupulously unscrupulous than a twisted legalist. Look at the formalist, the Pharisee, and the Jesuit! Although the gulf goes infinitely deep, the distance across, from righteousness to overrighteousness, is slender, and from overrighteousness to unrighteousness, yet narrower.

In his third and final temptation, the Devil again transports our Lord to a high mountain, in a scene

reminiscent of the Pisgah prospect enjoyed by Moses on Mt. Nebo; and then offers him, not only the land of milk and honey, but all the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof—in exchange for our Lord's obeisance. Note the escalation of evil. Having at first tempted our Lord to rebel against supernal authority, he at last tempted him to bow beneath infernal authority. Autonomy ends in servility.

For Israel had also been tempted to commit idolatry, and she abased herself before the golden calf. Yet our Lord stood steadfast. And when the Devil departs, the angels descend. Having declined the bread of angels under duress, he receives their ministrations under obedience.

From Adam's day down to our own, the cloven print of every false faith lies in this reaching for the crown without the cross and grasping after godhood instead of God redeeming manhood. The children of the world are out to make a name for themselves. They erect marble monuments in their own honor, and overspread evil with gold-leaf. But gold-plated sin soon wears thin, leaving only the leaden-weight of sin beneath.

Meanwhile, the Christian has no forename, but only a surname. As with the church of Pergamum, our Lord names a people after himself—just as a bride takes her husband's name. And he has inscribed his initials in stone—a cornerstone which will never crack or crumble. For the only treasure that allures his eyes is the precious gem of his holy Bride—as an ornament

of grace, pried free from the gilded dross of a vain
and perishable crown.

Chapter 6

-1-

Ash Wednesday is the first day in Lent. Traditionally, the season of Lent marked a forty-day fast before Easter. Although the demand for fasting has been relaxed over time, the feast retains its penitential tone.

In the Bible, dust and ashes betoken the human condition—as a token which figures in the very constitution of our creaturely and fallen frame.

For God formed the earth from the primal dust of the world. And he formed the man from the dust of the earth. All the nations weigh as fine dust in the balance. And if he withdrew his Spirit, man would turn back into dust. So dust is a token of creation.

And yet.

When Adam fell into sin, he was cursed to return to the dust from whence he was taken. And the serpent was cursed to crawl on its belly and lick the dust all the days of its life. Job repented in dust and ashes, but the wicked will cower in the dust on the Day of the Lord. God shall reduce the kings of the earth to dust by his outstretched sword, and incinerate the wicked as ashes underfoot of the righteous. So dust is a token of judgment.

And yet.

God will multiply the seed of Abraham as the fine dust of the desert. The saints that sleep in the dust of the earth will awaken and shout for joy. All that go down to the dust shall bow before the Lord. So dust is a token of grace.

And yet.

Dust is dust. What makes the dust to differ in creation, judgment, and grace? Not in the constituent elements. Rather, it lies entirely in what the Lord does with such dust—as the potter shapes the clay. Man is but a bit of animated clay—not a rarified quintessence, but a congeries of inert dust particles made magnetic by the impartation of static energy as the sevenfold Spirit fans the deep into fulsome form.

And so.

The First Adam was banished from the garden and condemned to a harvest of thorns and thistles. But the Last Adam wore our accurséd crown of thorns upon his own brow, that all the chosen sons of Adam should wear a crown of life and eat from the tree of life.

In the embertide of life, between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday; in the embertide of life, when hope hibernates and joy cycles south; in the embertide of life, under the ardent flame of fermentation, we fast and pray for the day when the lean land shall flower and new wine will pour forth from the distillery of

the soul. All honor, praise and glory be to thee, O Christ—our Lord, our light and our heart's delight.

-2-

Where's Aiken?

He left with your father. After I stow the ashes and spot-clean a few smudges, we'll all have lunch at home.

Can I help?

Sure! Here's a dust cloth. You seemed to be a bit distracted during the sermon.

Oh, I was wondering...

Wondering?

About death. I never gave it much thought—maybe because I'm still so young and haven't lost anyone dear to me. I've got you and Dad—and Aiken, sort of. Grandma and Grandpa passed away before I was born. What was it like to lose your mother?

My spirit wintered in Gilead for a season of grief—before the good Lord graced me with a Springtime of the soul.

What do you most remember about her?

It's hard to single out any one thing. Memory is a broken mirror of shattered, scattered shards of light.

You missed a spot over there.

Thanks for pointing that out.

Her hands...

“Her hands”? Whose hands?

I was just thinking. I guess that’s what I most remember about my mother – those hands of hers.

How so?

A mother’s hands are ministers of mercy—like an angel-errand dispatched from heaven. They beckon and bless, clasp and clap, render and receive—stroking our cheek and smoothing our hair, binding our wounds and drying our tears, forming our fingers to draw and our palms to pray; so that when I saw her hands, those soft and smooth and busy hands—whose gentle touch I’d felt a thousand-thousand times before—now as deep-veined and weatherworn as a dry leaf, as they there lay idle and neatly folded in the open casket—when I saw them for that final time... well, it brought back everything.

You speak as if it a day had hardly passed.

Death can never dim a mother’s lasting love. Her silent lips still speak in gracious deeds indelible upon the God-pocked soul.

How did you cope with your grief?

My mother used to say that sorrow is but another name for glory deferred.

What did she mean?

I didn't understand at the first. But when my grandmother died, she ran away to heaven with a little bit of my heart. And when my mother died, she ran away with another piece. And it went that way every time I lost a godly member of my kinfolk. By the time I come to die, I'll have nothing left to leave behind except a hole in the ground, for my heart has gone ahead of me to heaven.

Like when we moved down here?—we loaded our stuff on the moving van, so that it was there waiting for us when we moved in. Our old home no longer felt like home, for everything that made it feel like home was gone. And our new house already had the dog-eared nostalgia of home because we brought along all of our old books and pictures and instruments.

Yes, that's right. So very much of what makes a thing of joy a joy is the shared moment and the shared remembrance. As I grow older, life steadily closes in and seals me away, brick-by-brick, behind a vacant wall of private memories, until the final brick is put in place and I am left all alone. But God is with me in the darkness. And death is a back door leading out into another world where all our loved ones loved of God have gone before and gone ahead. Long has my longing heart left this mortal post and fled to heaven, but the body keeps my sorrowing soul pinned down and pining upward as a tethered bird.

What do you think heaven will be like? I find it hard to imagine a bodiless being.

Remember Jacob's dream of heaven? That's what heaven is like... yes, like a dream—a mass reverie. Have you ever dreamed a dream more vivid than the waking world?

Yes, I once dreamt of a garden. The blues were bluer and greens greener than I've ever seen with my waking eyes. And I heard music... oh, what music I heard! I wish I could remember. I was sorry I had to wake up.

Yes, yes, that's it! The here-after isn't any less real than our life here-below, but, in a way, even more so; because our earthly journey is only a shadow of all the good things yet to come, for what is seen is passing, but what is unseen is everlasting. What we take to be the firm contours of our familiar world are as insubstantial as a mirrored image, and vanish as soon as light declines. I've always thought it would be wonderful to die in my sleep, to pass imperceptibly from the mortal to the immortal dream, as the walls of the dying dream turn translucent and dissolve into vistas of illimitable light. For there there is no here and there; for there we together dwell in a temple without windows or walls—as blended souls of spirits bright.

The way you used to come into my bedroom, throw open the curtains, and wake me with a morning kiss?

That never occurred to me. But I'm glad you think so. See how providence multiplies our little efforts!

I especially remember a bad dream I had as a child. It was windy and dark, and I saw a shadowy figure approaching me. But I couldn't move. I felt frozen in place. Then I heard a distant voice calling my name. As the voice kept calling, the sky became lighter and brighter, and the voice became louder and louder—until I opened my eyes and saw you standing over my bed with a candle in hand.

That's what a mother's for.

But won't you miss Aiken and me when you leave us behind?

No, for that will be *your* belated heaven. And our bliss shall be redoubled and trebled when we are once again together.

Do you think that Aiken will be with us?

I wish I could say yes. He's always been a bit of a drifter and vagabond—like a fugitive driven forth from the face of the earth. If he'd just spend more time in the Bible, maybe something would click. My mother used to say you can't milk a cow before you feed it!

How will heaven be heaven without him?

I only know to say that as you season in the faith you come more and more to learn how the Lord's unkindness was a kindness. Love is very like pain. Where there is no loss, there is no longing. Without the winepress, there is no wine—which is why the Lord must sift and grind our hard-grained hearts to

make manna of the soul and vintage of the heart. And so, what felt at first like a burden became a grace delayed.

When Adam left the land of Eden, and Abraham—the Ur of the Chaldees, and Lot—the cities of the plain, and Moses—the court of Pharaoh, and Rahab—the gated city, they left mother and father and fatherland; and all for what? For thorns and thistles. A land of salt. Parched places in the wilderness. The steely hills of Zoar. And yet, in glancing back at a fair distance, what did they really leave behind?—but burning cities and flooded plains, idolatries and obscenities. And what did they receive in return?—but the gracious prospect of a higher, and a better, and an ever-during destiny.

Chapter 7

This morning we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration. About a week after Peter's confession of Jesus as the anointed Son of the living God, our Lord takes Peter, James and John to a high mountain—most likely Mt. Meron, overlooking the waters of Merom, where Joshua defeated the King of Shimron-meron and his cobelligerents. And there he prays—prays into the late-night hours as his disciples slumber on, in an evil omen of Gethsemane.

While in prayer, his countenance and clothing begin to beam with the glory of the midday sun. This was the corona of God's palpable presence, which had long before enshrouded another mountain, suffused the tent of meeting, and guided the Israelites by night.

The disciples wake up, no doubt stirred from their slumbers by the light. Imagine the impact of their being roused from sleep by the searing brightness of Christ?—with his cutout figure framed against the tenebrous terrain.

The scene, with its mountainous setting and penumbral glow, would naturally remind Matthew's Jewish readers of Moses' encounter with God on Sinai. Yet this scene presents a point of contrast as well, for the Mosaic aureole was only an afterglow left by his brush with the Shekinah; but here, the

nimbic numinosity and luminosity of Christ preceded the descent of the Shekinah.

Again, Matthew's Jewish readers could scarcely fail to register so significant a difference. Moses only beheld the backside of God, for the law came by Moses; but Peter, James and John beheld the very face of God in Christ; for grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Jesus is to the sun as Moses to the moon. Moses *mirrored* the glory of God, but the Redeemer is *radiant* with the glory of God, for he *is* the glory of God incarnate—slow to anger, steadfast in grace and abounding in loving-kindness as he maintains mercy to the thousandth generation of those that love him—while visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons to the third and fourth generation of those that hate him. And every disciple of Christ has a share in his Transfiguration.

For here the Lawgiver greets his Lord. The last time we met Moses was some fifteen hundred years before when we left him on his mountainous deathbed overlooking the land of Beulah. Moses never entered the promised land, and—yet again—Moses did indeed enter that land; he never entered the land below, but he entered the land above. For our footsteps are edged in fine gold as the gilded light of his countenance haloes the way and leads us upward, like the pillar of fire, to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.

Chapter 8

-1-

Christabel, would you help me with these palm branches? I'd ask your mother or brother, but I don't see them around.

Where do you want them put?

Around the altar.

Okay, how's that?

Maybe you could arrange them a bit. I'm sorry to saddle you with so many extra chores. You hardly get a breather.

That's okay. I love church work.

The altar flowers look lovely. Did you do that as well?

Yes!

Where did you find them?

They grow wild in the churchyard

I thought they felt familiar. What are they called, anyway? I'm afraid I don't know much about flowers.

Neither do I, but Aiken said they were trout lilies.

I'm glad you and he are spending some time together. I know it was hard on you when he left home.

Yes, it gets a little lonely – especially after leaving the last parish.

I hope you're making new friends at St. Cecilia's

I am, but when you're a preacher's kid, they set you apart.

Remember that I was a preacher's kid myself! So I understand.

Do you still miss your Dad?

Of course!

But does the sorrow lessen as the years go by?

As I grow older, and my eyes dimmer, and my ears duller, and my footsteps slower, it seems as though my waking days contract as I withdraw into a shadowland lit by the candlelight of dreams. The daylight hours of early youth pass as a swift river, of flashing veneer, clear through to the bottom below. The twilight hours of advancing age are like a deep and boundless sea into which the spent streams of youth empty their driftwood.

Dreams are where the past lives on, where what was lost to time regathers, where the flesh slips from the soul; and the naked soul, disburdened by life's dead-weight, renews its youth in a second spring.

In life, we awaken on the front end of a dream, reentering the sensible realm; in death, we awaken on the back end of a dream, entering into the spiritual realm. The believer's dream is a sacramental dream, a

dream of a better country, a saintly communion, and a church triumphant—where sun and stars never reach, but all is white with the light of the Lord's loving countenance.

And did you always want to follow your father into the ministry?

No, for many were the years when the seed of the Word fell lifeless on the unconsecrated ground of my moribund soul—until one day the Spirit from on high swept down, and whispered in my heart, and roused me from the sleeping-sickness of sin and living death.

But where does that leave me? For I have no fire-tongued testimony to share with others, but only the witness of my simple, commonplace faith—plain as a daisy or dandelion in May.

Don't sell yourself short, for so much of the beauty and beatitude of a flower lies in the point of contrast. The Christian is like a rose in mid-winter; for the sweetness of a lone rose recalls all balm of a summer past and stands as a present pledge and token of hope against the pallid landscape, even as the blood of Christ to a dying world. God will be your sun and shield, and you shall be his altar flower to the unchurched—perfuming a lost world with the fragrance of Christ and drawing men upward, like a hive of honeybees, to the heavenly nectar of eternal grace.

This morning we celebrate Palm Sunday. After the Transfiguration, Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Such was not, of course, the first time he had traveled to the Holy City, but this time he stages a spectacle. "The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; he shone forth from Mt. Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints."

Why the business of the donkey and the foal? This goes back—way back—to Jacob's deathbed blessing of Judah: "Judah is a lion's cub, and his scepter shall not depart until Shiloh comes." Many of you may be acquainted with that part of the oracle from my sermon on the star of Bethlehem. But it goes on to speak of his donkey and donkey's colt—tethered to a vine; while, in turn, the vine ties it to the succeeding image of the winepress, as his garments are stained by the blood of grapes.

So Jacob's benediction sees ahead, but it also sees behind. Its Edenic imagery and heraldic hue transport us all the way back to the woman's seed and serpent-slayer, while it looks forward—forward to the enthronement of Jedidiah, and the advent of the wine-dark warrior from Bozrah. And all of which lies, in the dissolving distances of time, as a harbinger of the knight on the white horse.

Christ is the *cantus firmus* of Scripture—from Genesis to Revelation. For Zechariah goes on to say that "He shall speak peace to the nations; he shall free his

prisoners of hope from a waterless abyss; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and his reign from Euphrates to the uttermost ends of the earth.”

What is so unnerving is that this crowd, which greets him with a wave-offering and lauds him with loud hosannas as its king – yes, this very same crowd will a week later clamor for his crucifixion. How could it be quite so fickle?

As usual, it is John, the omnipresent eyewitness, who preserves a key detail. For he says, in one of his customary asides, that they came to see Jesus because they had heard about the raising of Lazarus. So, for them, Jesus was just a traveling circus act. And when he didn't perform magic tricks on demand, they turned against him. So may we search our hearts and ask what makes any one of us to differ from that fickle crowd. God requires so little of us, and requites so much in return. Spare a lifetime for him and he will spare a timeless life for you.

Yet there is in this foreboding story one shining exception, for even if he had no other disciples, the children would be his foremost followers. It is proverbial that children are more often discerning in the ways of God than grow-ups, for which reason our Lord puts them forth as a pattern of faith.

It has been said that when Andrew Wiles presented his proof of Fermat's Last Theorem, there were only half a dozen men present who could make sense of it. Over the centuries, many great philosophers and

theologians have devised arguments for the existence of God. But God is at once more subtle and simple than any equation, so that a perfect proof of God would be so simple that even a child could scan it, and yet so subtle that the highest archangel could never span it—like a three-part fugue with a singular theme and infinitely trifoliated exposition.

-3-

It's so good to have my brother back after all these months—even if it's just for a couple of weeks.

I missed you too.

How do you like college so far?

I enjoy the sassy, brassy pace of big city life. You should come up and visit me some time. I'd give you the grand tour.

Sorry, but I couldn't breathe in the big city. What you find expansive I'd find suffocating to the soul.

But what's so bad about the big city?

For one thing, I can't see the stars at night.

Is that all?

No, the whole thing gives me the creeps. Tophet is near to being a lost child in a big city. Can't you see how a huge city resembles a sprawling concrete cemetery?—as skyscrapers thrust up like giant tombstones against the mud-colored horizon! Oh,

Aiken! Why did you go forth from our presence to dwell in the city—the forsaken city, the tumultuous city, the bloody city and city of destruction?

Life at St. Cecilia's was too much like looking at butterflies under glass. I needed to stretch out. I can't live like a monk, and—frankly—I've outgrown it. Don't you ever wish to break the glass and fly away?

Far too many folks outgrow what they ought to grow into—in seeing the world through a child's eyes, as Adam on the sixth day. So have you settled on a major?

I was toying with astronomy.

Why?

Ever since I saw old footage of the lunar landings, I've had a hankering to visit the moon. So maybe I'll join NASA and become a cosmonaut.

The next time I see the man-in-the-moon I'll wave at you!

And I'll wave back! But what have you been up to since I was away?

I'm a volunteer at the crisis clinic.

I thought you were working at the animal shelter.

For a time. But I outgrew it.

I'm sorry to hear that. You always had a soft spot for furry things and feathery things—anything that could

coo, moo, meow, hoot, twitter or chirp. Why don't you become a veterinarian?

I only care for the outside of animals – not the gooey insides! Besides, there are bigger issues in life. Which reminds me... Mom's been kind of worried about you.

That's what Moms are for!

She's concerned that...

I get the sneaky feeling that you're using Mom as a stocking-horse to express what's on your own mind.

Ah, your X-ray vision can see right through my feminine wiles!

Look, I know that you and Mom and Dad have a one-track mind, and I respect that. But I've heard it all a thousand times before. This has to be real for me. I can't play a role I don't believe in.

I understand.

What exactly do you get out of it? I mean, it's clearly real enough to you. Always has been since we were kids.

That isn't easy to put into words. But when I leave my bedroom window open at night, I can hear the bells of St. Cecilia wafting across the valley as they knell the nocturns. So even though I cannot see the church after dark, yet as long as I can hear the tolling of the bells, I know the church is there. And I guess that's what it's like to have the Lord in my life. For whenever I read

the Bible or sing a hymn, it seems as though a passing bell were sounding from another world and resounding in my soul. And as long as I follow my mortbell, its tintinnabulations will summon me forth from my own world and welcome me into the next.

Would that I had such a bell pealing in my soul. But I'm afraid my ears are too heavy to hear its dulcet tone calling to me in the dark.

Maybe you have too much noise in your life. Perhaps you need to turn down the volume.

Perhaps. But without the inner ear of the soul, am I not a hollow shell – whistling in the wind?

So you've never felt close to God?

You know that funny feeling when you suddenly remember you forgot something? You still don't remember just *what* you forgot, but you remember that you forgot *something*—something so terribly important! And so you rack your brains and run through things in your mind to jog your memory!

Of course! We've all had that experience!

Well, that's how I feel—all the time. I woke up with this string tied to my finger. I don't remember when I put it on or why. I almost remember... almost! Everywhere I look I get that funny feeling. It drives me a little crazy!

So you do feel there's more to life than meets the eye!

I wish I could believe. But, at most, man is only a polite animal.

Chapter 9

-1-

Christabel, would you help me draw some warm water and take the pots up to the Cenaculum?

Sure, Mom! But wouldn't it be easier to do the whole thing in the refectory?

Yes, dear, but that would spoil the symbolism. It is better if the ceremony takes place in the upper room—seeing as that's where Jesus held the Last Supper, and washed the disciples' feet, and prayed for them all... well, not all— not Judas!

Sometimes, when I pray, I don't feel like I'm being heard.

Prayer begins with God reaching down his hand to uplift us.

How so?

When I think of prayer, I think of that Proverb about the virtuous wife: "She's like a merchant ship—bringing her food from afar." So the spirit of prayer is like a clipper ship launched forth from heaven. When it arrives in dock, we load it full of petitions salted with our tears and incensed with our praise, and set it sailing back to heaven—blown homeward by the

trade wind of his heavenly Dove. Then God sends it down to us again with a spice-scented cargo of answered supplications. And so goes—this journeying and returning, returning and journeying, from heaven to earth, and back again—in a ceaseless round of processions and recessions, responsions and antiphons.

You mean that I wouldn't have a heart for prayer unless he had planted a prayer in my heart?

The Word heard and the word returned are the heart of holy living. I nest his Word within the walled garden of my heart, and his Word becomes the throbbing songbird of my heart throughout the watches of the day and night. Although I have leave the garden every now and then to do my business in the world, I return at once to resume this inner conclave of the soul.

Where are the guys going to do the foot-washing?

In the Baptistery.

Oh, I think that's maybe my very favorite part of the whole church! It's so soothing and peaceful to have a mountain stream running right through the Baptistery. I often go there just to read and pray and meditate—as clerestoried light softly falls upon the floral tiling while the stream makes murmured melody against the round, reverberant walls.

Maundy-Thursday takes its name from the *mandatum novum* or “new commandment” which our Lord issued at the Last Supper, as we read in John’s Gospel. The peculiar tension in this scene lies in the fact that only Jesus and Judas understand each other. The disciples hear and overhear what Jesus says, and they sense some ulterior sense, but they lack any grasp of the magnitude and imminence of the crisis to come. Ironically, it is only his betrayer who enjoys the deeper spiritual discernment at this fatal and fateful juncture, while the disciples listen in a fog of growing frustration.

Jesus rises from the supper to wash their feet. As we all recall, Peter makes a big fuss. Because this incident stands out in the account itself, as well as our memory of the account, it is easy for us to miss a subtle and yet more forceful underthrust; for so fully does our Lord take to himself the role of a servant that he even kneels down to wash the feet of Judas—the son of perdition—in full foreknowledge that on this very night, Judas shall betray him to the authorities.

And this gesture, in turn, triggers, in mind and motion alike, the indictment of David: “he who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me”; for Judas has just broken bread with him, and is about to raise his bathed heel against him.

Then Jesus sops a morsel of bread in the dip and hands it to Judas. The dip is a *paté* of bitter herbs,

commemorating the Passover and prefiguring the office of Paschal Lamb as he prepares to imbibe the wormwood and the gall of God's wrathful cup.

Judas takes the morsel. The deal is struck. Then Judas departs into the night—into the gross darkness of a soul-gnashing and never-ending night.

We are apt to think of life and light as natural, inevitable events. But Christ is the vine, and we are the branches. We only enjoy life and light in union and communion with Christ. And our life here-below only carries over into the life above because we live in fellowship with the living and everliving God. Whoever does not dwell in the Son walks in the fellowship of death and darkness—of thick darkness and the second death.

After his dying discourse, our Lord leads his disciples in a Psalm of praise. This should give us pause. On the brink of his supreme suffering, of a degree and depth of suffering the like of which has not been seen from the foundation of the world to the basement of hell, Jesus sings a Psalm of praise. "For the *joy* set before him"—the joy of his impending exaltation at the Father's right hand—"Jesus endured the cross, despising its shame."

From there he proceeds to Gethsemane, as the antechapel of his Passion. Some believers are bothered by his hesitation: "Father, if you are willing, then take away this cup; yet your will be done, not mine." What are we to make of this?

There are no doubt depths to the love of the Father and his incarnate Son that are fathomless to the plummet of a clay-born brain. But this much we can say.

Luke informs us that, after the temptation in the wilderness, the Devil departed for a more opportune season. What is striking is that the Devil never puts in another public appearance. It is easy to brace ourselves against an open foe; far harder to guard against temptation's soft somnabulary tread—more soundless than the dead.

We're apt to think that the sword of temptation is sharpest when it strikes at a point of weakness, such as a natural appetite. And the edge can be quite penetrating if it cuts into joint of something we cherish. The Tempter thrust in the prospect of power and vainglory, for that is what he himself prizes, but it found no chink in him who numbers the cattle on a thousand hills as his very own.

A far keener blade is to turn a point of strength against itself. It is natural for young sons to love and even adore their fathers. But as they mature, they generally outgrow this adulation. Yet on rare occasion you see a father and son who have grown together rather than apart. The adult son is now his aging father's equal, yet with devotion undiminished.

In this we see a sample of that exemplary fellowship between the Father and the Son. The prospect of emotional separation was so very wrenching because

of the incomparable bond between Father and Son. We, whose fellowship with God is broken at best, can never imagine the impact on a Being who had always enjoyed a sinless and seamless communion with the Father—from timeless eternity to conception in time. Compared with his forty-day fast and wilderness' temptation, this was infinitely more trying.

That is why Gethsemane presents a divided Christ. For love of the lost sheep, he must relinquish his Father's love, as the Father cannot pull away unless the Son pushes him away. His heart for the Father is unable to harmonize this monstrous contrariety, and so he doesn't even try, but instead resigns himself to the Father's wisdom and will. What could be more perfect?

Some believers feel that if our Lord was impeccable, then his temptations were a charade. To the contrary, temptation cuts us most deeply, not when we can give in, but when we cannot—knowing that if we decline to drink the bitter cup to the dregs, then someone else less able must drain it dry and die. But because our Lord suffered alone, we can now endure the silence of God—for he has borne it before us and for us at Gethsemane and Calvary.

Chapter 10

The Good Friday service is divided into two parts: the fourteen Stations of the Cross, and the *Tre Ore*. The stations flank the *Tre Ore*, which is a meditation on the seven last words. In the Old Testament, the life of holiness was pictured as an inward journey from the Holy Land to the Holy City, to the sanctuary, and to the inner *sanctum*. And the ecclesial calendar likewise describes a spiral motion of the soul – from the church year to Holy Week, to the Stations of the Cross, and to the seven last words.

Ritual has a bad reputation, for it has come to be associated with dead formalism. And we must confess that ritual has all too often been the heirloom of a cadaverous creed. But, far from being a distant and deadly affair, the sum and substance of ritual, when rightly framed in thought, word and deed, is to bring doctrine down to the level of daily experience. For it renders in vivid and vital form what otherwise lies lifeless in impractical abstraction. That is one reason the Old Testament is so full of ritual, and – indeed – the whole history of Israel is a ritual play of Christian redemption.

I shall be preaching the *Tre Ore*, while my wife, Evangeline, will conduct the Stations of the Cross, for she has studied and observed this devotion over

many years—just how many, I dare not say, lest I get in trouble!

This is a marathon service. But that is so because it pegs the marathon exertion and ordeal of our Lord. I pray that such an exercise will convey some slight inkling of what our Lord suffered in our stead and on our behalf. I now turn over the reins to my wife.

Thank you, Guy. When the Crusaders returned from the Holy Land, some of them set up a “Little Jerusalem” in their homes to memorialize their pilgrimage. And this became a popular devotion for medieval believers who didn’t have the wherewithal to undertake such a journey abroad. By the same token, the antechapel in medieval cathedrals was dubbed the *galilee*; for just as Galilee marked the border of the Holy Land and Holy City, so the antechapel marks the outer boundary to the nave and high altar.

Observance of the church calendar and Stations of the Cross are a way in which we may order our lives on the life of Christ. May we make a Little Jerusalem in our own hearts as we retrace the steps of his Passion.

At St. Cecilia’s, the stained-glass panels lining the ambulatory depict the Stations of the Cross. These stations are patterned on the Passion of Christ as he trod the *Via Dolorosa* from the Gabbatha to Golgotha. Thus the gospel reverses the law, as the way of holiness now takes us outside the camp.

In the first panel we see Jesus standing before Pilate. Pilate is like a rat trapped in a burning barn, as we watch him frantically searching for a way out. On the one hand, he's afraid that the Jews will denounce him to Caesar as the sympathizer of a revolutionary and rival. On the other hand, he senses something about Jesus. To the Jews, Jesus' divine sonship was incredible—even though an ancient oracle had foretold the birth of their mighty God.

But to Pilate, with his heathen outlook and lowered sights, the prospect of a god coming down in the semblance of men was not at all incredible. It would be a fearful thing to offend a god. Classical mythology and drama were filled with cautionary tales of the kind—from the myth of Baucis and Philemon to the *Baccae*. And Jesus had about him an indescribable aura that lent the allegation an unsettling air of credibility. Pilate, though knowing less, believed more; while the Jews, though knowing more, believed less. Pilate's anxiety is not that the charge might be false, but true—truer than the Jewish accusers imagined. Jesus is innocent because he is guilty—guilty as charged.

When he finds out that Jesus falls under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, he tries to palm the prisoner off on Herod. But Herod sends him back. Then, when the rabble demand the customary clemency, he senses his moment and grabs at the

chance—but they demand Barabbas instead. So he is left without an easy escape.

Look at our Lord's expression, and compare Pilate's frenzied agitation with the serene self-composure of Christ before his judges and accusers. This is the sovereign calm that sees above and behind the machinations of Annas, Antipas, Caiaphas and Pilate, to the inexorable plan and hidden hand of a God in whose firm grasp they are only clay dolls dancing to a divine obbligato.

Pilate pacifies his conscience by quite literally washing his hands of the matter. But his bloodguilt is invisible and indelible. Instead of washing away his sin in the blood of Christ, he sinfully washes away the blood of Christ.

In the end, Pilate is a shortsighted fool, just as Herod the Great was a shortsighted fool. Each one wagered away his soul to beg off a more momentary threat. But damnation knows no abridgement or abatement.

-2-

In the second panel we see Jesus bearing his cross. Here we may recall the words of Jesus to Peter by the Sea of Galilee: "When you're an old man, you'll stretch out your hands and another will bear you where you don't wish to go." This was a prophecy of Peter's martyrdom. But Jesus will willingly take up his cross and stretch out his hands.

This isn't to say that Peter was unwilling to die for his Lord. But he was a creature, like you and me, at the mercy of circumstance. By contrast, there's nothing passive or impassive in the Passion of Christ. For the Son of Man was upraised to drive the Dragon from power and draw all manner of men to himself.

Just as the only son of Father Abraham bore upon his back the wood of sacrifice, so the only Son of God the Father bore the Cross to Calvary. Just as Father Abraham bound his only son and laid him on the wood, so the God the Father laid his only Son upon the wood and bound him fast. So history returns upon itself, but with a crucial difference. God had stayed the sacrifice of Isaac, for God himself would supply the lamb. And now the Lord redeems that ancient oracle. The blood of slaughtered bulls and smoke of burning goats could never atone for sin, but only foreshadowed the final and real redemption of souls.

-3-

In the third panel we see the first fall of Christ along the *Via Dolorosa*. In traditional art, Jesus is often shown as a man of rather slight build and smooth, pale complexion. Yet, as a carpenter, he was a manual laborer. And the marvel is not that his strength gave way at this point, but that it held out so long. For scourging tore into flesh and bone. Many men died under scrounging alone, due to massive blood loss.

In the fourth panel we see Jesus meet his mother. There is a long liturgical tradition of Mary as the *Mater Dolorosa*. Much of Marian devotion is trumped up around the Passion of Mary, as a parody of the Passion of Christ. And, indeed, didn't Simeon the seer tell her that a sword would pierce her own soul?

No doubt the sight of her son bleeding and bearing a cross cut her to the quick—as only a mother could feel. But Simeon's prophecy meant something quite otherwise. The advent of Christ was “destined”—feel the full weight of that word—was *destined* for the downfall and rising of many in Israel, as he rekindled the eyes of the outwardly blind while blinding the eyes of the outwardly seeing.

And this didn't only apply to Israel in general, but cut across family lines—setting father against son and mother against daughter. Submission to Christ would take precedence over breast and blood.

And it didn't stop there. For we know that, before he appeared to James on Easter Sunday, even Jesus' half-brothers were unbelievers.

But, finally, even Mary must take sides. The sword which will run her through is like the sword of judgment that passed through Jerusalem in the days of Ezekiel the prophet. No one is exempt from the solemn summons of Christ. No one can stand neutral before his kingly call and royal rule.

-5-

In the fifth panel, we see Simon of Cyrene commandeered to shoulder the cross. Due to his weakened condition, Jesus can now no longer bear the weight of the heavy crossbeam. Cyrene was a port town in North Africa with a generous Jewish colony. Simon himself was likely in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast.

The Passover commemorates the exodus from Egypt. But our pilgrim was favored to share in a far more momentous redemption, of which the Exodus was only a shadow. And we can judge the lasting impact of this incident on Simon's heart from the fact that his two sons later became believers, as we read in the Book of Acts.

Prudentius dubbed our Lord the Crucifer or cross-bearer. In traditional churches, the crucifer is an acolyte who bears the cross in solemn processions and recessions. And every disciple of Christ is called upon to daily take up his own cross. Every follower of our Lord is a son of Simon of Cyrene. The mark of a true church lines not in apostolic succession, but in its cruciferous succession.

-6-

In the sixth panel, we see Veronica wipe the face of Jesus. The name "Veronica" is a compound word,

from *vera icon*, meaning “true image.” This legend may have its origin in the Holy Shroud of Turin—or vice versa—which many Christians believe to bear the image of our Risen Lord.

But be that as it may, our Lord had a face, a face without form or comeliness—the human face of the faceless God. The Second Commandment forbade graven images of God, and we Evangelicals have no use for iconography; for when our God was bodied forth in Christ, all the attributes of Godhood were thereby bodied forth. Christ is omniscience Incarnate, omnipotence Incarnate—glory, grace and truth Incarnate. He, and he alone, is the *vera icon* of the invisible God.

Every orphan and exile, expatriate and prisoner looks longingly to make out a familiar face in the crowd. Babies learn right away to tell their mother’s face. Merely to look on her face quiets a cry and brings a smile. Her warm, orient countenance shines like the constant sun of Gibeon, and in her familial features they see a preview of their own; and we, as we look into the looking-glass of the Lord of glory, are dawning into the same similitude—from glory to glory.

-7-

In the seventh panel we see our Lord fall for a second time. When Adam fell, he brought down the whole

house of Adam, but the redeemed are uplifted by the descent of the second Adam as he comes down—down from heaven, down from the cross, down to the grave of a hundred slumbering generations—from Adam, and Abel, and Jonah in the *vesica piscis*. And like a child's seesaw, in his falling is their rising.

-8-

In the eighth panel, we see the women of Jerusalem commiserating with Christ. Yet he rebuffs their lamentation. Why is he so brusque?

This is, of course, a culture in which wailing and mourning were often a *pro forma* fashion. Indeed, you could hire ritual mourners. And there may be an element of pretension and ostentation in their extravagant cries and tears and breast-beating.

Yet there is a deeper danger. And that is to turn Jesus into an object of pity rather than piety, bathos rather than pathos. There is a terribly long tradition of this in Christian art and music. Indeed, it burgeoned into a spiritual industry. Yet this betrays a false piety.

We should never, ever feel sorry for Jesus. Jesus is not a helpless victim of cruel circumstance. He was in complete command of his destiny—from its eternal decree to its providential finis.

Many men and women are moved to tears who were never moved to repentance. And faith in Christ is not a feeling of fellow sympathy. I am not saved because I

identify with him in his suffering, but because he has identified with me in my sin.

“Weep not for me, but for yourselves.” When I see Jesus on the cross, I shouldn’t say, “Poor Jesus!” but “poor me!” –I, who am wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked before my holy Lord and God. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

-9-

In the ninth panel we see Jesus stumble and fall for a final time. There are many fallings in Scripture. Lucifer fell from heaven. Adam fell from the Holy Mount. The Angel of the Lord fell upon Mt. Horeb. The Spirit of the Lord fell upon the prophets of old, and then upon our Lord at the Jordan, and then upon the Church at Pentecost. The stars are going fall at the end of the age, and the damned shall fall forever down the shaft of the bottomless pit. Anyone who falls over the rock of Christ will break his neck, and anyone on whom that rock should fall shall be ground to powder.

In the Garden of Gethsemane we saw several fallings. While his disciples fell asleep, our Lord fell on his face in prayer. And when he was arrested, his captors fell back in dread before the appearance of the likeness of

the glory of the Lord, while his disciples fell away and scattered like scared sheep.

They fall, one and all, and yet they did not fall beyond recall, for they fell into the palm of God Almighty. For that very night, at the Last Supper, their Lord had spread a fine-mesh net beneath them—woven of unbreakable thread and spun from the everlasting loom of God. The prayer of Christ for his own is invincible and irrevocable.

-10-

At the Last Supper, he laid his garments aside to wash the disciples' feet, but here he lays them by to wash away their sins. Beneath the frowning brow of heaven he hangs as Jacob's ladder long ago.

Much allegorical exegesis has been lavished on his seamless robe. And all efforts to assign it a fanciful significance have obscured its true significance. For in the Law of Moses, one of the chief articles of the sacerdotal vestments was a seamlessly woven waistband; and to Jewish ears attuned to the annual recitation of the Law, and Jewish eyes accustomed to the annual ministration of the High Priest, this detail could hardly escape their knowing notice.

The High Priest dressed up and brought the yearly offering into the inner *sanctum*, but Christ strips down and becomes the offering—as priest and victim in

one. And his self-immolation shall atone once and for all time.

Now I'll turn the service back over to my husband Guy.

-11-

The *Tre Ore* commemorates the three hours that our Lord suffered on the Cross. We know from *The Pilgrimage of Etheria* that this service goes back at least as far as the Fourth Century Church of Jerusalem. We begin at noon because he suffered there from midday until three in the afternoon. While he was on the Cross he uttered six or seven sayings. Traditionally, these are known as the seven last words.

Why is there evil? Why did a good God ordain the Fall? Why did God conclude all of Adam's race in unbelief? That he might have mercy on all believers. Knowing God is the highest good, for God is the highest good. In the moon and stars we see God's glory in profile—as Moses glimpsed him on the hump of Horeb—but at the Cross we see his glory face-to-face. In Christ, both gift and giver are rolled into one. The primavernal glory of the Garden was radiant with the goodness of God, and yet his goodness burned more brightly in the harvest glory of the Cross. The pure streams of Eden were able to slacken the thirst of a drought-parched tongue, but from a cleft in the flinty face of the rock at Rephidim there

flowed a soul-drenching, soul-quenching stream. And as the white light of day has its own glory, and daylight contains every shade of the rainbow, yet invisibly until it passes through the opal and the cloud, so the aureoled essence of the Godhead at last broke forth in the gem-stoned setting of the Cross. For God wrought all things so that his iridescent wisdom would be refracted in the church and cast a heavenly reflection on the watchers of the upper world.

Blindness is a natural ill. But a man born blind is the more grateful for sight restored than a man who takes the gift of vision for granted. In the spectrum of grace, the redeemed perceive a more warmly hued world than Adam on the sixth day.

In one respect, the naturally sighted man and the newly sighted man see the very same thing. And yet a blind man seeing for the very first time takes in so much more, is thankful for every crinkled leaf and passing cloud, piddling stream and distant star. And eyes opened by grace sweep in a whole world awash with coarse-grained colors and velutinous hues—while the squint-eyed infidel can only look in askance at the gray-shaded flatlands of a fallen terrain. To the cross-eyed, every scene is crooked and perverse. But to the eye of faith, every crooked path is made straight by the lucid lens of grace.

“Father, forgive them.”

This may only be a scribal gloss. But it is true in one respect, at least. For Jesus was a man of prayer. His whole life was awash in prayer. And he frequently withdrew into the wilderness to pray alone. He often spent entire nights in prayer. Have you ever noticed how he especially prayed at high points and low points and turning points in his life and mission?—at the baptism, and Transfiguration, and garden of Gethsemane? And after his ascension, he ever lives to make intercession for his people.

And in the Upper Room—just listen to his high priestly prayer! Like dropping a pebble in a pond, his petition ripples out in concentric waves of grace as he prays—first for himself, and then for his disciples, and then for their disciples, and finally for all followers, past and prospective, that the elect of every age may be gathered together into the everlasting fellowship of the Church Triumphant. It is his own upward-welling and outward-swelling prayer that sets our own prayer-life in motion. For if our prayers avail with the Father, this is only because his prayer *for us* avails with the Father and floats our supplications heavenward to the throne of his grace.

“Today you’ll be with me in Paradise.”

What could the thief do to atone for his sin? Could he do good deeds? Not bound hand and foot! Could he plead for a second chance? Not in the face of imminent death!

If there is any hope for such a man, only the sheer grace of God can proffer that hope. And is not each one of us a thief upon his cross? Are we not all facing into the grave? Have we not all robbed God? Are we not all penniless to redeem our debt?

One thief justified himself, the other took the side of Christ. Which one went to Paradise? Notice, too, that this was Paradise, and not the *Limbus Patrum* or Purgatory. If there were a Purgatory, then that is the most he could have hoped for; for even though he was hardly the worst of men, he was scarcely the best. Yet in our Lord’s assurance to the thief, we hear no apportioning of absolution by weight, measure and number. How could there be? For all the merit lies on the side of Christ.

The thief understood this entirely. Instead of trying to justify himself, like his fellow thief, he pled guilty and, instead, justified Jesus alone.

Notice, also, that there is no question here of soul sleep. Paradise is not Nirvana. Paradise is not a dormitory. No, when Jesus entered into Paradise, he entered into his kingdom and glory – the kingdom of

heaven—as the returning king, seated at the right hand of the Father.

This passage has been a proof-text for deathbed conversion, and rightly so. But the thief was only saved at the eleventh hour because he knew to whom to pray. He knew who Jesus was. He turned to Jesus for mercy in time of need. He didn't call on Buddha or Sophia or Mahound or Krishna or Zoroaster or one of his lucky stars. No, for in his utmost extremity he called on the almighty name of Jesus—before which every knee shall bow and tongue confess. Raise your children in the faith, for even if they should stray from the path of the righteous, they'll know the way home.

-iii-

“Woman, see your son!”

Even though our Lord had been trodden down in winepress of wrath for three aching hours, he can still rise above the travail of his soul to provide for his mother. At the wedding of Cana, she had taken matters into her own hands, and was gently reproofed for her presumption. Now her son takes the initiative in the care of his widowed mother. Nothing is too large for omnipotence or too little for providence.

As the eldest son, this burden had fallen to him many times before. The fact that he did not take up his ministry until he was about thirty goes to show that

spiritual imperatives do not necessarily preempt natural obligations. Each must be discharged as time and circumstance permit. And he evidently does not feel that his half-brothers can as yet be trusted with sole custody. Now that he will no longer be on the scene to oversee her situation, he places her under the care and supervision of the beloved disciple, who was likely a nephew by Salome. As she was losing her beloved son, he gives her another son—the beloved disciple.

-iv-

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

On the Cross our Lord was forsaken by his family and followers and, worst of all, by his Father. Have you ever noticed that a bad man is never friendless whereas a good man must often stand alone? Such is the inverted logic of a fallen moral order.

Many readers take this to be a cry of doubt and despair. Had he forgotten his mission? Had he lost faith? Was he too maddened by pain to be lucid?

Yet let us remember that our Lord was not *posing* a question, but *quoting* a question. Running through his head was the twenty-second psalm, which begins with this very query. So he has the word of God on his dying lips. Is this an act of faltering faith? Is that not, rather, an act of persevering faith?

Like a steady descent into the valley of the shadow of death, the first half of the lament lays David in the very dust of death; but midway through the psalm – at the nethermost nadir of David’s decline – the mood suddenly takes wing in one unbroken upward flight of faith: “I will proclaim your name to my brethren; I will praise you in the midst of the congregation!” In David we see the prefigurement, and in Christ – the fulfillment.

Because the Father sent such leanness into his soul, we have in him a high priest able to sympathize with our own penumbral soul. And because our Lord has passed into the heavens, we look on him as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, for the path of the righteous shines brighter by ascending degrees – from the matinal to the meridian hour.

-v-

“I’m thirsty.”

This exclamation is at once so very earthy and commonplace. The Creator of heaven and earth has here lowered himself to the most rudimentary of needs. How demeaning that he must now presume upon the tender mercies of his tormentors! How is it that man can be so proud and God so humble?

Yet behind this expression of utter helplessness and abject humiliation lies the almighty providence of God, for he speaks in fulfillment of ancient Scripture:

“My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, so they gave me vinegar for my thirst.” God was never more omnipotent than when he appeared to be most impotent.

-vi-

“It is finished!”

We read that on the seventh day, the Lord God rested from all his labors. And just as his works were finished from the foundation of the world, so the Savior was offered just once to bear the sins of many. And so the deed of redemption was done—done in one loving, and everlasting, and all-surpassing act. I was a man condemned, under sentence of death, and awaiting execution. But here I have my pardon in hand, signed in blood—the indelible blood of my only Savior and Judge.

And in his ending is our beginning. For just as human history began once the world was made, so redemption inaugurates creation anew.

-vii-

“Into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Now we come to our Lord’s very last utterance—this side of the grave. Yet his final words were not his own, but are lifted from the lips of David. If Jesus,

who was the Word behind the Word, and able at any time to speak by virtue of his own inappellable authority, was so totally submitted to the word of God, how can we, who are fallible and fallen, afford to be any less reliant on the Bible, whose every word is sweeter than honey from the rock?

He quotes it, I say, but with a difference. For David never dared to address God as his "Father." But now the long, onerous journey has come full circle as the Son, who was with the Father from eternity, is poised to resume his former glory.

Notice that Jesus didn't merely expire. Even though outwardly impotent and immobile, he commanded the exact moment of his death and departure from this world. "No man takes it from me, for I lay it down of my own accord!" When Jesus told Pilate that he had no real authority over him, that must have rung hollow in his ears. How often had Pilate heard condemned men shake their fist and feign a fearless demeanor? Another statistic. Another idle boast. Another unmarked grave of a would-be revolutionary. What is truth?

Yet at his most evidently helpless, with hands and feet fast nailed to the cross, Christ dictates that singular moment over which even the most mighty of men have no natural power. Men may slay themselves, or be slain in battle, or die of disease or old age, but no man can merely will the moment of his death. Our Lord was, indeed, a man—but so much

more than a man. And his divinity was never more ascendant than when his humanity was most evident.

When Jesus spoke these words, he spoke, not only for himself, but for all his people. For we find the same sentiment on the dying lips of Stephen, the protomartyr. What a supreme solace to know that I, as I lie on my deathbed, have someone waiting to receive my unclothed soul when I come to cross the threshold of heaven—and not just anyone, but the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. Our Lord's parting words roll out the headlands of hope on which a people called by his name have ever founded their lives and faced into the featureless horizon.

Evangeline, it's your turn again.

-12-

In the twelfth panel we see his bent body hanging from a crimsoned cross as the sun shines sanguine in the swift encroaching eclipse. For long hours he had burned under the burnished sun. While he was in the world he held the shadows at bay, but now the sky shall soon go altogether dark. At the ninth plague, darkness skirted a sunny spot of Goshen; but at the ninth hour, as the Light of the world is snuffed out, darkness overtakes the day as black beams radiate from the innermost centrum of being to the outermost spiral of space and time.

Folks sometimes ask me why there was light on day one before there were lights on day four? Why so? Because our globe resembles an ark sailing upon the glassy seas of outer space; just as the ark had three decks, with windows and a roof, as well as water above and below; so the world, we're told, had windows and a roof, with heavenly, and earthly, and sea-bedded decks, as well as water above and below. Now you cannot install skylights until you put the roof on, yet the sun was shining all along.

Children, walk in the light while you have the light. Like a hiker on a mountain pass, as he races against the receding light, we tread on twilight hills. Our life is lived in a shaft of light before the setting of the sun. So let us press ahead with all haste before the dusk overtakes us, and the wind whistles across the naked terrain, and our feet start to stumble on the dark and treacherous trail, and the shadow of death begins to cast his cold, numbing chill over our fingers and toes and crawl up our limbs and creep into our veins.

-13-

In the thirteenth panel we see the corpse of Christ taken down from the cross—like lugging a slab of half-frozen meat. The Lord of life lay lifeless. No docetic death, this, but death in all its stiff-jointed, limp-leadened lifelessness.

He had to be taken down, yet not to be raised—for glorification is indifferent to place and posture, as earth and sea, sealed sarcophagus and open field shall all render up their dead on judgment day; but had they left him hanging there, he would have awakened with immortal flesh now nailed to the tree. Just as God sent an earthquake to crack open the tombs of Old Testament faithful and free them to appear in the Holy City, so he removed his Son from the Cross and rolled away the stone on Easter morn.

The line between life and death is at once so fine and final. In the moment before death, the mortal frame is a window case for a bright-lit soul. Through this window the housekeeper looks out and leans out onto the world. Through this window, we peer back into his soul. And through this window we exchange laughter and pass presents across our own windowsill.

But at the moment of death, the light withdraws and the housekeeper leaves. The room goes dark. The window is boarded up. The house is the same, but suddenly still, silent, quiet, dark, and empty—so very utterly empty. “How does the city sit solitary that once was full of people! How has she become as a widow! How is the gold become dim, and from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed!”

Yet even in its desolate state, we love the old house, for its walls resound with tender remembrance. But without the housekeeper to tend it, it rapidly dilapidates. So we burn it to the ground before the rot

and the rats and the weeds deface it beyond fond recognition and recall. Then the cinders of memory are all we have to hug to our blighted soul – until we, too, must turn out the light and take our leave.

And yet is it owing to “the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, for his compassion never fails, but is renewed with the dawn; great is his faithfulness!” For even though our earthly house is falling apart, we have a house not built by hands – eternal in the heavens. So will we, like Lot, settle in the cities of the plain? Or, with Abraham, pitch our tent in clear sight of the supernal city? For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

-14-

In the fourteenth and final panel we watch Nicodemus perfume his body with myrrh and aloes. Judas and Nicodemus present a counterpoint. When Nicodemus came to Christ, he came by night; but by coming to Christ, he stepped out of the darkness and into the light – thereby becoming heir to the inheritance of the saints in light. Yet when Judas left the Last Supper, he stepped out of the light and into the darkness. As a child of darkness, he could never comprehend the light or come to the light. But just as the Magi brought frankincense and myrrh to honor the newborn king, Nicodemus brought a princely sum of myrrh and aloes to honor the new-fallen king.

Joseph and Nicodemus then lay their Lord in a chrysalid cave within a private garden plot. Have you ever noticed how often gardens figure at turning points of sacred history? God planted a garden east of Eden—as the site of our fatherland and fall. In Isaiah, the Promised Land is likened to a riverside garden, with aloes planted by God. Our Lord prayed in a garden atop Mt. Olivet. In Revelation, the New Jerusalem is a park-like metropolis where the tree of life lines the river of life. And here our Lord is laid to rest in a garden.

Notice, again, how many a graveyard resembles a garden—carpeted in fields of fresh-cut grass, with gracious shade trees and sweet-scented flowers. Why are we so drawn to that setting as an image of death and place of rest? Certainly the quiet place and quieting pace, so outwardly reposeful, make a fit figure for the sleep of death. In a well-kept cemetery, the passage of time grinds to a perpetual noontide—as a shadow of the empyrean reaches above, where speed and slowness meet.

Yet it is also a type of dormant vitality, in its primavernal freshness and fecundity, as honeybees hum and hover over the open flowers while songbirds bid their paramours. Indeed, the Christian rite of burial goes back to a belief in the resurrection of the body—just as Joseph made provision to have his bones carted out of Egypt and planted in the Promised Land. Life ends in death, while death ends in life. Nicodemus spoke to Christ of birth and

rebirth. Now he presides at his death. Yet this is a death that shall bring forth a quickening and everlasting life, for “unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it will bear a bumper crop.”

But fundamentally and finally, it reminds us of Eden. Like a migrant bird, we retain a homing instinct for our ancestral land and lost paradise. We cannot find it here on earth, yet every now and then we catch a sudden, fleeting, heart-freezing glimpse of something which dings that old forgotten fog bell; for God has planted eternity in our hearts; and as the wayfaring crane yearns yearly to return to her birthplace, our fretful peregrinations only leave us lonely and longing for a better country.

Here, then, we see a similitude between Eden and Easter. Yet Easter is more than Eden anew. The river of life is not a stream of Lethe, for forgiveness is not forgetfulness, but grateful remembrance—just as a lost child is happier when found than had he ever strayed. And that, my friends, is why we sang the Isaac Watts hymn this morning, because in Christ “the tribes of Adam boast more glories than their

Chapter 11

-1-

On this somber morning we gather to observe the Ante-Communion. Where was Jesus on Holy Saturday? Did he descend into hell, as the old creed says? Doesn't St. Peter say that Jesus preached to the damned? Yes, quite so! But that was only *after* Easter, when he was "*revived* by the Spirit." Then our Risen and Ascended Lord did, indeed, triumph over the principalities and powers, having sat down at the Father's right hand and brought all his enemies under his heel—just as Isaiah taunted fallen Lucifer, and Ezekiel—the downcast cherub.

Yesterday, as I preached on the seven last words, I touched on what Jesus told the thief. Then and there, on Good Friday, Jesus assured him that they would both be in Paradise that very day.

Where is Paradise? Is Paradise in hell? When Jesus pledges to feed his people from the tree of life, planted in the Paradise of God, is he threatening to cast them into the lake of fire? When St. Paul was swept up to the third heaven of Paradise, did he find himself in the bottomless pit?

Paradise is the very antipode of hell. Jesus went to heaven to prepare a place for us, that where he is,

there may we be also. On Eastern morn, our Lord's denuded soul will reunite with his incorrupt corpse, not by rising out of the bowels of hell, but by sweeping down from the heights of heaven. Greeks and Romans had an Orphic cult, but we need no Orpheus, for we have Christ, who holds in his almighty hand the keys of death and hell.

Scripture sometimes speaks of the sleep of death, for sleep and death are outwardly alike, and both mark an end of one condition and onset of another. By the same token, sunup and sundown are outwardly indistinct, and it is only by the aid of geography that we distinguish them. To a resident of the West Coast, the sight of the sun on the pelagic horizon marks the doom of day, but to a resident of the Eastern Seaboard, the advent of a new day.

For an unbeliever, the close of life folds its wings like a Mayfly. And where he himself is concerned, that is true enough, for no dawning day awaits him on the other side, but only an unwaking and nightmarish night. But for the dead in Christ in the death of Christ, the Resurrection reverses our mortal meridian—like Isaiah's sundial. Rather than marking the *midpoint* between eventide and Eastertide, Holy Saturday marks the *turning-point*—as the Resurrection transposes our westerling star into a hyperboreal region of first light and everlasting light.

Aiken, did you have anything planned between services?

No, Mom.

I thought it would be nice if you and I could squeeze in some personal time before you go back to college.

Suits me just fine. Were we going to eat out?

I don't think there's time for that. So I made some sandwiches. Did you mind eating in the refectory?

No problem.

How do you like college life? Ever get to play your drums?

I started a small band. Nothing official—just jammin' with a few of the guys in my dorm.

Now that you've left home I get to see so little of my only son.

Mom, I phone and email all the time.

Yes, and I cherish every note and call. But it's not the same as having you here. Even when you're alone in your old bedroom, the place feels different—happier, homier. I guess that's like the presence of God. For although we cannot see him face-to-face, we live and move and have our being in his constant, quiet company and soul-sustaining fellowship.

Like a longing?

More than a longing. Like longing and belonging. There are degrees of separation—in space, time and eternity.

And degrees of each—between what was and is to come.

Time shortens while heaven hastens and eternity lengthens—as the dawn of an everlasting day casts long shadows over the shoreless sea of glass, and all our yesterdays make haste to that immortal day.

Dad and I had a talk about that last Christmas. But it all seems so otherworldly.

In a way. But there's a difference between the world and worldliness.

What difference?

The sensible world is a gift of God, to be savored by all. But the spirit of the world—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life—is passing away; yet whoever does the will of God endures forever. So raise a toast to every native good, but be not drunk on the world, for the world will keep you plastered until you wake up screaming in hell.

Okay, but it's as if, to love God, you can't love anything else.

No, we should also love God in all the good things he's given us. God imparts something of himself by giving us things that remind us of him. Just as the narthex is illuminated by the nave, the ante-chapel of the world is all the more lovely for being backlit by

the light of grace—like a keyhole into heaven. It reminds me of my mother's death.

What do you mean?

On her deathbed, as earth receded, and heaven succeeded, I spied a fugitive glimpse of eternity in her eyes, like a light burning from behind—just as we cannot see the evening star until the sun has set.

Yeah, but it seems like you and dad and Christabel never set foot outside of church.

Again, there's a difference between the church and churchliness.

What difference?

The church is not a temple, but a tabernacle. Not only must a pilgrim break camp with a dying world, but with a dying church, and daily bear a tent-of-meeting on his back—for here we have no resting-place, but live as wanderers and wayfarers upon the broad face of the earth. The Temple was a tabernacle etched in stone, yet where is it today? The Lord alone has been our dwelling-place in every generation.

But won't you miss the world you leave behind?

Having the sun, I need not the shadow.

What about St. Cecilia's?

A church is just a campsite for road-weary nomads.

What makes a church a church?

The faith of the faithful.

But doesn't the prospect of living forever with God begin to pall over time?

What makes a summer day more winsome than a gray day in December?

Why, the summer sun, of course!

Exactly! What makes them to differ is the quality of light. It's presence and absence, variety and intensity. And yet we never see the light, but only the play of light. If the effect of light is what beautifies an unlit object, and if incident light is such a thing of beauty, imagine, then, the glory of the very Lord of light in heaven's sempiternal summer!

Is that the presence of God?

Trying to pin down the presence of God is like trying to put beauty into words. For what we apprehend is not a sense of sheer beauty, but beauty's effect—that calming and soothing and stilling effect upon a turbulent soul.

The way I feel in seeing the face of a beautiful woman?

Spoken like a real man! A thing of beauty is a sensible simile of timeless eternity. And so one never tires of the transfixing power of beauty below or transfiguring power of beauty above.

If heaven was all it's cracked up to be, why did Lucifer ever rebel?

Maybe because he never knew how good he had it.
But we know better, for we've seen heaven from this
side of hell.

You and Dad always talk in metaphors.

Because, my dear, that is what the world *is*—a
hieroglyph of God. That is why every truth invites a
thousand similes. For the world is a lyric poem, and a
poet puts a little something of himself into every line.

It's still so oblique.

Not entirely so. Not when the poet wrote himself into
his own poem; for, in the presence of Christ, face and
mask merge into one. Have you ever had the sense of
someone staring at you?

Of course, everyone has.

How did you know?

I don't know how I knew. I just do, that's all!

Exactly so! The presence of God is like the sun staring
down upon my back and shoulders, foreshadowing
his face from behind; and when I awaken in death
and turn about, I'll be satisfied to see his likeless.

Maybe if I were born again I'd better understand. Did
you have a conversion experience?

Yes.

What was it like?

I suppose the New Birth is like awakening from a
coma—after overhearing muffled voices, and sensing

shutters shutting, and wincing at skin-pricks, and smelling antiseptic air.

Can't you find God in nature?

Indeed, you cannot fail to find God in nature.

So what's the big deal, anyway?

You can find God in nature, but not the *way* to God.

Sometimes I wonder why it matters what people believe as long as they're well-meaning and warmhearted.

To be embowered from birth in the life and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is such a blessing, but it can blind you to the graceless state of the world. To a native of Goshen, all is sunny and bright, for he has never set foot inside the plague-darkened districts of Egypt.

But I *have* left my little Goshen, and my classmates don't seem especially wicked. Like, sure, they've got a mouth that makes the wall paint peel, but by-and-large they're all regular, stand-up guys.

Remember that every heresy is a half-truth. To be well-reputed in a disreputable age is no great attainment. One skunk smells sweet to another. The only difference between friends and enemies is enemies never let you down. So do not judge by sight, but faith; for here there is no life but in death, no death but in Christ, no life but in Christ; and all the many saints of a many-mansioned glory are tributary to that one undying life and deathless death.

Chapter 12

We reconvene at this vespertine hour to celebrate the Paschal Vigil. Our modern sense of time is derived from the Benedictine call to prayer. “Noon” comes from *Nones*, and “clock” comes from *cloche*, which was a Frankish word for “bell,” as monks were summoned to pray throughout the watches of the day and night. The canonical hours were modeled upon the sevenfold pattern of prayer in the Great Psalm: “seven times a day I praise you.” And the midnight office was a vigil for the final advent of the Bridgroom.

As I light the Paschal candle, let us all begin by singing the *Lumen Christi*. May our lips concord with the inner hymn-tune of the heart, and our Lauds with the laudable stars.

Vigils are a fixture of human life. The deathbed vigil is a classic case. Knowing that a loved one will soon depart, family and friends gather by his bedside to say goodbye and see him off. This used to be more common in the days of high infant mortality. It is still common in the case of aging parents or terminal patients. And it is striking how often people pass away in the night.

Another kind of vigil is where the outcome is uncertain. Again, this used to be more common before the advent of antibiotics. And it is still common

in the case of a serious accident, when the patient is in critical condition. Other examples include stroke and heart attack.

In all such instances, there is an element of suspense. Where death is assumed, only the timing is in doubt. The tone of the vigil varies in kind as well. At a deathbed vigil, there is expectancy and sorrow. And if there is hope, it is hope in the afterworld. But where death is in doubt, there is hope in the here-and-now, short of expectancy, and short of sorrow, but trembling on the verge of either grief or joy.

Yet in all kinds and cases, a vigil is a time of waiting. And the waiting is heavier to bear because the vigilants are passive and powerless in face of the outcome. They can pray, and cheer or commiserate with one another, but nothing more.

But the Pascal Vigil is a vigil without precedent or parallel in the history of the world. For every other vigil is a vigil for the living. Even at a deathbed vigil, the loved one is alive. Though dying, he is still in the land of the living. No one holds a vigil for the dead. A wake, perchance, but not a vigil. For after death, all expectancy is gone.

And the Pascal Vigil marks an utterly unexampled reversal of the natural order. At a deathbed vigil, there is a passage from life to death, yet never from death to life. But at the Pascal Vigil, we wait for the dead to rise again. In the midst of death we are in life. And this vigil holds out hope for the living and for

the dying, mourner and mourned—because his vigil encloses ours to come.

In redemptive history, the first vigil was at once the first Passover. Although it is only natural that we should associate the Seder with the Paschal Lamb, the feast of Passover takes its name from the angel of death. For the very first feast of Passover was an antidote to the plague of the firstborn. The Israelites were commanded and admonished to withdraw into their homes that evening, and stain the lintels with the shed blood of a yearling lamb, and wait within until the angel of death had slain the firstborn of Egypt, and wait within until the angel had passed over the firstborn of Goshen. Only at sunup was it safe to leave their homes.

And so this evening we wait within, signed with the blood of the spotless Lamb of God, and wait within as our Lord takes upon himself the plague of the firstborn, and wait within as our Lord does battle with the angel of death, and wait within for the passing of the midnight hour and the power of darkness, and wait within for the first light of Easter morn to pierce these stained-glass panes with the glory of Sun of Righteousness, as he rises with healing in his wings. And so we wait.

Chapter 13

-1-

The Bible is a book of remembrance – of mighty deeds done by God on behalf of his people. The Sabbath commemorates creation; the rainbow – the flood; Passover – the Exodus; and communion – the Cross, circumcision commemorates the Old Covenant, and baptism – the New. Jacob built a memorial after his dream at Bethel, while Joshua built another after fording the Jordan. The gemstones on the ephod commemorate the twelve tribes of Israel, while the foundations of the New Jerusalem memorialize the twelve apostles. The meaning of all such memorials is not to look backward, but to face forward from the vantagepoint of the past as a pledge and presentiment of the coming Consummation – for there yet remains a rest for the people of God. And we may enter that rest by faith's farsighted eye and hope's double vision of things below and things beyond.

Between Eastertide and Whitsunday, Jesus sent his disciples to Galilee. This was where he had first summoned Andrew and Peter, James and John from their trade as fishermen to become fishers of men. They had followed him, not knowing their term of service, only to endure three unyielding years of ministry. They had followed him, not knowing the

ordeal of Holy Week, only to endure the nightmarish blur of Maundy-Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

And in the end he takes them back to where it all began. They fish throughout the watches of the night, only to come up empty-handed and hungry. It is then that a familiar voice calls out to them. In the distance and the dimness of the twilight hour, they cannot quite make him out. And, indeed, his very aspect is altered. Just as a tree flowering in spring is the same tree withering in winter, so the body that once lay in the grave is now abloom with glory immortal.

Yet they comply, half out of habit, for the sheep know the Shepherd's voice—the voice that multiplied the loaves and fishes, the voice that called them from their nets so long ago, the very voice that spoke the fish and sea into being. For the miraculous draft of fish recalls the vision of Ezekiel, where the overbrimming basin sweetens the Dead Sea so that it swarms and roils with fish as on the fifth day of creation, while fishermen spread wide their waiting nets.

There was nothing to hinder their Lord from ascending straightway to heaven. Indeed, the prospect of leaving behind this odious little orb must have been magnetic. Yet he lingers long enough to share one more meal with his disciples. As God once spread a table in the wilderness, laden with the bread of angels and water from the rock, so the Savior prepares for them a little breakfast of barbecued fish.

The outward calm of this simple scene will soon be blasted by stoning and beating and martyrdom, but in the stillness of the matinal hour – before he ascends to the Father, and James is put to the sword, and Peter stretches forth his hands, and John dies on the Isle of Patmos – he shares with them the sustaining memory of a final meal by the sea – as a sign of the glassy sea above, and seal of that all-surpassing peace which our sorry world can never render or rescind.

-2-

Where are Mom and Christabel?

They left after the service.

Weren't we all going back home for lunch?

No, I thought it would be nice if the two of us had lunch together before you head back to start Spring term.

First Mom and now you. I'm beginning to feel like a death row inmate. I hope this isn't my last meal!

I trust not. But we're all on death row, and tomorrow isn't promised us.

What's on the menu?

I had your mother make some sandwiches. Let me fetch them from the fridge.

Where will we eat?

On such an amiable Spring day, why don't we eat outside in the churchyard?

-3-

Let us say grace. We thank you, O Lord, for ears to hear, eyes to see, and fingers to feel. We thank you for a tongue to taste and tell, and a nose to smell. We thank you for bread and wine, meat and drink, dream and sleep.

We thank you for the Northern Lights and the Southern Cross. We thank you for length of days and songs in the night, tuneful birds and the daughters of song. We thank you for harvest rains and rainbows, crystalline seas and limpid streams. We thank you for flowing valleys and leaping hills, shady trees and tender leaves, almond blossoms and open roses. We thank you for wingéd winds and sunset clouds, fireflies and butterflies, honeybees and turtledoves.

We thank you for devout fathers and devoted sons, godly mothers and god-fearing daughters. We thank you for a birth below and a birth above, a restful death and a kingdom to come.

We thank you for the word of truth, the throne of grace, and the promise of prayer. We thank you for the ageless angels and the saints of the ages. We thank you for the Father's love, the Spirit's life, and Son's salvation—from the inmost border of time to all the sprawling days of heaven. Amen.

The sanctuary was wonderful this morning, as the rising sun shined warm, and the stained-glass scattered its rays in shafts of pure and primary hue—like a rainbow captured in amber.

I'm glad you enjoyed the service. Yes, morning is the very best time of day. Did you ever notice how the fan-vaulting soars like a cedar—underlit by beams of an orient sun?

I was wondering—why did you marry Mom?

Funny you should ask. She reminded me of a stained-glass window.

How so?

She has a way of turning a gray day into a cathedral of color. A man strives to put his stamp on the world—from carving his initials in a tree to planting his flag on the moon; but a good and godly woman imbues and suffuses her surroundings, not by effecting an outward alteration, but by reflecting and refracting the brittle light in the iridescent faith and opalescent grace of her prismatic presence—as the outward spectrum passes through the inward speculum of her holy soul. Living with her, I always see the sun rise twice.

No wonder you and Mom have been so happy!

Yes, God set us apart to bring us together. Do you remember the burden of Jeremiah? “O, Moab, flee the city, and nest in the rock—like a dove dwelling in a covert of the cliff.” Distant from the noise and

notoriety of the world, we duet one another like a pair of turtledoves. And so our simple joys are more fulfilling than all the frenzied pleasures of the frantic globe.

But you have seen the world, whereas I have just begun to strike out on my own.

A sense of adventure is a good thing in a young man—as long as you remember that our Lord has undertaken the greater gest, on our behalf and in our stead.

Then what is left for me to do?

When a man courts and conquers a woman's heart, and raises up godly seed in his own image, that is his own gest. And every lesser gest is emblematic of the greater.

If only I could believe it.

And why don't you?

I just can't bring myself to believe all that stuff about Lot's wife and Jonah's whale, talking-snakes and backward-casting sundials. It's like something out of a fairy tale or nursery rhyme. You don't take that tomfoolery at face value, do you, Dad?

Yes, son, every last word of it. And I'd rather be a holy fool than a disputer of the age. Remember that the royal fool is the only character in the play who's in on the joke!

Well, if I have to commit intellectual suicide to stay in the Church, that's too high a price.

"Intellectual suicide"? I find it funny how often a self-styled "free-thinker" resorts to that shopworn phrase. Is he reasoning—or repeating? In fact, campus life is like a shame culture or even suicide cult. "If you loved us, you'd die with us!"

Well, whatever my motives, the old time religion still strikes me as utterly impossible.

Possibility is so very relative. And your dismissal prejudges the issue. Is the sensible world a soulless machine or a medium of the spirit? If matter in motion were all there was, then—yes—such phenomena would be quite impossible. But if being embraces a realm of spirit as well as matter, and if matter is subordinate to spirit, as an organ or vehicle of the spirit, then time and space are fluid categories—like clay in the hands of the potter. And if earthly things were configured to prefigure heavenly things, then the world is, indeed, a sort of fairy tale writ large.

Okay, but even if it the story of Scripture isn't strictly impossible, that doesn't make it any less incredible or improbable. There's a mismatch between the world of the Bible and the world I see out my window. Men like Moses, Jonah and Joshua, Elijah, Elisha and Daniel all seem to have lived and died under a different sun than I rise and retire to.

But that is only the measure of your inexperience. In Scripture itself, Mary, Sarah, and Zecharias, the murmuring Israelites and the little-faithed followers of Christ, were incredulous about anything out of the ordinary. There's an ironic sense in which the very success of the Gospel renders the Gospel less credible by driving the Devil underground. But it isn't coincidental that where the Gospel is in decline, the occult is on the rise. Whenever the church loses faith in the Devil, the world goes back to believing in him. Secular science only sweeps away the rubble of ruined churches to clear a path for the infernal insurgency. Remember that the Renaissance, and not the Middle Ages, was the witching hour. And as the Pentecostal flames of the Reformation and Great Awakening die down, the witching hour strikes again.

I take it, then, that you've never been tempted to leave the faith.

Not on account of intellectual doubts, if that's what you mean, for although I always doubt myself, I never doubt my God. Faith is often beclouded by sin and self-doubt, to the overshadowing of its outward radiance; yet it flames forth as embers blown by the breath of the Almighty, and unquenchable as a burning bush.

Yes, I guess that's what I meant, but now you've peaked my curiosity. Are you hinting at some other snare that tempted you to stray?

There was a woman, once...

A woman? Now that *is* interesting—and a bit surprising! I've never heard about another woman.

No, you wouldn't, for this was well before I met your mother, and I never mentioned it to her or anyone else—until now, that is. Understand that what I'm about to tell you is strictly a father-son confidence.

I'm honored!

As to you're being surprised, I'd only say that, contrary to what you may secretly suspect, your old man not just a brain-in-a-vat.

Ah, that's a relief! But what about the mystery woman?

She wasn't especially pretty or witty or wise. But to hear her sing was to feel the cooling caress of a South Sea breeze against your cheek, and taste the scent of cinnamon leaves under your breath; for her voice was redolent with every savor of the Spice Islands, and fell as gumdrops on a weary land. Possession it was—singing is too weak a word! She was a lost soul summoning another soul to share her inconsolable loneliness.

Of course, that's the poetry of youth! But if older men and women no longer talk this way, it isn't because they're too sober, but because they're too drunk with the world to detect their own inebriation. I wouldn't say that I was ever at serious risk of falling away, for nothing can snap the golden chain that binds us to

our lover's everlasting love. But what I would say is that she alone made me feel the bitter-sweet romance of rebellion, and if I ever *were* in grave peril of apostasy, it would be on her account, and not from dry doubts or airy cerebrations, which are affectations more than anything. She was a sort of anti-sacrament—an outward sign of a graceless soul. Well, you must think I'm blathering nonsense!

No, I know exactly what you mean. There's this girl at school... she's got gobs of ruffling red hair and the eyes of a watch-fire. She reminds me of a lost love, don't ask me why.

You sound smitten! Well, that's only natural. "Then Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and yet they felt like a few days—for the love he bore her." Every young man wants to wed a goddess. But as you age you settle for a woman.

What a come down!

Not really, for you find that the woman was better than the goddess.

Speaking of which, where did you meet her?

At a nightclub—although I once heard her sing in church. And for a fleeting hour I thought I saw a twinned soul afire with grace. But as soon as the last chord died down, a black cloud passed over the sun.

So how did it all end?

I broke it off. But I kept her letters – until I betrothed your mother. And burning them was a minor penance.

Was she the love of your life?

I've been blessed to know two such women – your mother being the other. It was a happy providence that your mother came into my life when she did. But I love your mother all the more for having once walked hand-in-hand with the damned.

Chapter 14

-1-

Another hour, another day, another month and year gone by. The reading for Ascension Sunday is taken from Psalm 110: “The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.” In this coronation oath, the Ancient of Days addresses the one who was at once the sovereign and scion of David—upon whom the sure mercies of David devolve in sceptered majesty and might.

In the Old Testament, the ritual cleansing of a leper made use of two birds. The priest dipped a live bird in the blood of a sacrificial bird, and sprinkled the leper seven times. Then he freed the live bird. And we, who once were lepers of living death, have been sprinkled by the blood of Christ, joining mortal to immortal life, and like an uncaged bird, shall soar with our Ascended Lord into the skies—as twice ten-thousand cloud-drawn chariots will harrow heavenward a saintéd host of captive souls. The wintry wilderness of our exile had thrown us back upon a granary of grace and bottled faith. But may the sun now shine upon our hibernating hearts and estival souls so that we will spread our dormant wings, mount heavenward, and forever fly in the light of the Lord’s eternal Spring.

Our God went up with a shout, and our Lord with the sound of a trumpet. As Captain of the host, the Lord Jesus Christ surveys the field of battle from the castellated summit of Mt. Zion, and there directs his legion legions until he brings every enemy under his heel. As the later and greater Moses, our Lord had passed through the waters and trod the wilderness. And now, as the later and greater Joshua, he comes forth to conquer Canaan and take possession of his blood-bought inheritance. For the Lord is a man of war.

And so shall come the great and terrible day of the Lord, when heaven is emptied of all but the Ancient of Days and the Breath of God Almighty; is emptied as the King of glory, bellipotent in battle, descends with sounding oliphant and archangelic shout; descends with Michael and all the heavenly host; descends with Enoch and all the saints triumphant; descends with Abel and all the crownéd martyrs; descends with Noah and all the prophets of God; descends to claim his holy bride—like a Crusader marching on Jerusalem.

And then the wide-horized hemisphere of heaven will be ringed by row upon row, and rank upon rank, and troop upon troop of angels and archangels, principalities and powers, thrones, dominions, cherubim and seraphim, and all the white-robed host of the redeemed, as he metes out judgment on all the living and the dead, and banishes the damned to outer and ever-deepening darkness.

And then the King of glory shall celebrate the supper of the Lamb, with all the multiplied myriads of saints and angels, seers and martyrs, when the kingdoms of our globe become the kingdoms of our God and of our Christ as they reign together, with the Holy Spirit, from east to west and age to age. Surrounded now by such a cloud of witnesses, let us live in the hope of the high calling of him whose wages are joy and whose service is peace.

-2-

Mabel, call the nurse!

Dr. Morgenstern, what's happening?

He's passing over. I'm sorry, Evelyn, but there's nothing more we can do for him. He is now in the hands of...

-3-

...Lo, my bride, see how she comes!

Donning a dozen-sunned diadem,

And laureled in a lunar anadem;

Jam lucis orto sidere.

Lo, my knight, see how he comes!

Clad in a blood-stained surcoat,
And seven-starred coat-of-arms,
As he rides upon a snow-white charger.

Lo, she comes,
With linen gown,
And pearled ring,
To wed her king.

He slays the red-dyed dragon
With his two-edged tongue,
And hurls him headless
Into the lake of unquenchable fire.

Rise up, my love!
Come forth, my dove!
For the fasting-days are past,
And the dreamery is spent.

The earth is in flower;
The season of the songbird has come,
With the descanting turtledove,

And the lovesick lyrebird.

Come to the marriage feast,

The Bride says, Come!

And the Spirit says, Come!

Even so — Come, Lord Jesus...