

*“Fiction has a truth exceeding that of history”*  
– Aristotle

***Year 4.10***

*The glare of white sand* shadowed to gray, rumbling waves lost their green sheen, and the hiss of dissipating foam edged closer. Sea birds screeched, gulls hopped among the debris of apple cores, carrot ends, food wrappers left by his rescuers, and his own empty beer cans, slim jim sheaths, and chip bag. Otherwise he was alone. A wind skimmed the waves chilling the air. In the distance the orange orb crushed a stratum of cloud dyeing the horizon with the blood of its muted fire. “Suppose you really do, toward the end, fall away into a sunset which is your own self-ignited pyre,” the dying sun sang in his ears, a siren chorus with the shrill voices of cicadas.

Stupid. And I am the exemplification of that stupidity. Shake it off. Gulp in breaths of denial that it can’t be all that bad. But which is worse, the headache or the heartache. The topsy-turvy scramble to regain mental balance in the face of an onslaught of contradiction and self-delusion painfully limited by my bone headedness or the gut churning, heart arresting, adrenal fueled, fear-based realization that it must end, and the immense futility of it all. Is there hope, that mocking seductive chimera, fickle as flickering day or is there only dark despair and night? Well, you live, you die.

Getting to his feet, wrapped in the blanket and feeling the full cold weight of being soaked to the skin, he stared out at the giant orange eyeball above the vast eyewash sea that seemingly demanded, “Just who the hell do you think you are?” He replied, “Nobody.”

All the bad luck, terrible accidents, cruel circumstances, the waking horror I’ve been through, brushed off simply to continue. I can hear people say “What great promise he had when he was younger.” At least I haven’t self-immolated as have so many of my contemporaries. Nora likes to joke, “There the smell of smoke about you, Carl, and I don’t mean cigarettes. It’s all those burned bridges.”

Death’s contagion breathed on him the familiar names of the departed in just the last year.

Dorian Pillsbury, aka “Doughboy” aka “Poppin’ Fresh.” Valerie Richards aka “Valentina Fox.” His ex, Shelia Norby aka “Sierra North.” Jeremiah “Jeremessiah” Beljahr. Candy “Tuna” Meltier. Tomas “Tom Tom” Valorbruto. Willy “Knickerbonkers” Hampton. Lynam Pauk aka “The Lyin King” who hadn’t survived long without Dotty or his opioid habit, on New Year’s Eve, and giving the definitive answer to the question in the lyric of that old Holiday song. Tom “Toot Sweet” Trolley. Denny “The Touch” Darns, or as some called him “Don’t Touch Me There.” Jody Kervish, known as the Shirley MacLaine of poetry. Faye “Ginny” Lawrence. Cathleen “Cat” Tchewlayder. Al “Crock” Gayteur and his crocodile tears no more.

Me and my shambling machinations, in the end the question is who are these worthless pricks and why am I wasting my time trying to be one of them? I have no use for tight-ass flyblown poets, confining my associations to a few friends and lovers. The lovers never hang around for very long, and the friends have become victims of the three deadly D's of friendship: disaffection, distance, and death. It's when those names come with a face and a memory of palpable interactions that are no longer active on the perceptual plane, having achieved the stasis of the infinitesimal, that the truth of mortality sinks in or at least gives pause to the recall of a vivid impression. You live you die.

As predicted the lap of waves advanced to cover much of the apron of sand casting its foamy perimeter within easy reach of where he stood contemplating the contents of his shoulder bag. He shook an amber pill bottle to hear it rattle. Time to order a refill. He dropped one then two and finally the last one into his palm. Enough to guarantee he would feel no pain. And dry throated one after the other blinking up at the inky blue.

I shouldn't think of life as disappointing. If nothing else it is consistent in its suffering, and that, in the face of it all, I am helpless. There's suffering because nothing stays the same which plays havoc with my desire to hold on to what works even if only for an instant which in turn causes the anxiety that makes me suffer. Nothing lasts forever and even that is gone in an instant. Life isn't anything unique by itself. It is what comes after what went before and what goes before what's to come. Conditioned by the past, it affects the future as a chain of instances linked by memory, desire's intelligence. It matters not one way or the other. It is all the same. Life or death.

Death is a hard act to follow. He paused at the spark of memory. Then, "I can't do it." As if by saying it out loud again propitiated the original awful moment. After the moderator of the panel he was on at the poetry conference just a few weeks past shakily announced that the third member of the panel, Reston Pease, and his family had been killed in an auto accident. What a downer that was. And proving once again that April is indeed the cruelest of months. It dragged on his psyche like a sea anchor.

All I can hope for is a kind of intuitive understanding of death, dying, which surpasses reason and rules out any further discussion. All things, being impermanent, have no separate and independent identity. The absolute is inherent in all phenomena. Ultimate reality can't be explained in terms of existence and nonexistence. Everything is real. Each thing is identical with all things. To exist is to be in relation to other things that exist. The universe is simply the set of all these relations. You live.

The deaths were circumstantial. There was no actual serial killer of poets. That much he had gathered from his last conversation with Grace Niklia. She'd laid out the faults

in his conspiracy theory as the transference of Jeremiah's paranoia as well as copping to her own wrong headedness in pursuing the investigation. She could be humble, admit her mistakes, something he still had difficulty with. The deaths of the poets were all caused by a combination of hubris, despair, mania, addiction, and accident, the consequence of an irresistible desire for fame and most likely resulting from a frontal cortex lesion that manifests itself as a loss of social awareness and inhibition, emotional instability, irritability, and impulsiveness. There is no grand conspiracy to kill poets except perhaps from themselves and by their own hand.

What comes of the illusion that even though I am edging toward the last days of my life that it is far from over, and joy and dread combined will find time enough to grow, planted in the fertile soil of anything of any moment up till now? Should I regret that at the end no one really ever got what I was doing and all the fame and attention are based on a house of cards, not on truth but on assumption and conjecture that have nothing to do with my poetry? You die.

*There was nothing in the laptop tote* that was vital to him at the moment: a dead phone, a book of not so great poetry by a promising poet who had died too young, a medical report that read like some kind of cruel literary joke. Poems Syndrome, really? All of it totally inconsequential and unnecessary. Not to mention the letter from the lawyers representing the Beljahr family with their final warning that if not refunded, the matter of the advance for the production of *Messiah, The Poems of Jeremiah Beljahr, edited by Carl Wendt* would be turned over to a collection agency. Both the unexpected hospitalization and then the Pillsbury Prize, each in their way, had created an insurmountable ambivalence toward resolving the matter. He glared back at the horizon. Poseidon rose out of the waves with a trident, aka underwater pickle fork, and said "Time to come home, son."

I acknowledge that there can be no other way. I must say my goodbyes. And the realization that the world says goodbye to you long before you leave it. Goodbye means the same in all languages although for some it is more definitive than others. In my language I must say goodbye to friends because either they died or I did, or they have alienated me, or me them, by their, or my, thoughtless behavior which is a kind of death to me, and to them. I wish it wasn't so, but it is. So goodbye to those of parted ways, you are dead to me as I am to you. And those who have through necessity and circumstance physically removed themselves from the immediacy of my presence, might as well be dead because memory is fickle and the longer separation is maintained the less the fact of your being matters. Nostalgia is merely the stubbed toe that calls attention to the foot and the blindness of inattention.

Unaccustomed to the unevenness of the path and his wobbly gait he located the thread of trail snaking up the side of the bluff to the parking lot. "It is no sin to advance limping," he mused. Eternal life belongs to those who live in the present someone once said. And his past was catching up with him. Death is the limit of life which

cannot be located within life. First you are and then you're not. Simple as that. But then, as Bakhtin once pointed out, "Nothing is ever absolutely dead."

As the limping man, I am Jason, and all smithies made lame or hamstrung. The limping hero, one shoe on, one shoe off, the missing sandal, the single footed, the dancer, the shaman. I go through life doing the same old thing over and over and then one day it's different. I've reached a threshold. Step across, carrying my bride of enlightenment or disillusionment.

Half way up the switchback he paused for a breath and stared at the ranks of clouds like the charred red bricks of a sacrificial altar. The physical exertion contributed greatly to the distribution of drugs through his system. Glazed by the failing light, his thoughts unconcerned of his body drifted to the checkout stand of a neighborhood bodega the previous week and the photo of Chris Salas looking torn and tattered with a couple of buxom blondes on the cover of a hip tabloid for an article entitled *Pearls Before Swine* with the caption *He's got a woman on each arm and more waiting in the limo*. The editor at Random House had been quite pleased with his article on Salas in PRIQ and had even offered to consider a manuscript of selected poems. Yet another crisis of self-worth presented itself to be ignored and denied, and along with it, an evil procrastination. His problem was that he had an opinion about everything except himself. He'd always operated under a cloud of profound doubt that no amount of jolly approbation would ever completely alleviate. He had to make a choice. Go with Amber Chiffon's Iron On Press offer of a collected, or take the Random House proposal for a selected. Nora advised that he take the Random House offer, and like a good agent and friend, had made a point of keeping a file of all his published poems so she was able to throw together a substantial selection. She reasoned that delaying a collected until a few years down the road would ensure better sales once he had a book from a nationally prominent publisher. What to call it, though. He was leaning toward *So Long* knowing that Norma would veto it. It had the particular kind of ambiguity that appealed to him. On the other hand, he could play to the classics crowd and title it *Ad Hoc*. Then again, in plain old American, *On The Fly*.

All I know is that every six months or so I die. I have died a hundred times a hundred, and it's always the same death. I don't know what dies, and why I have to be reborn again, always with the same high hopes, always the identical death. Death is a return to the cocoon. I should have died young like all the other promising talent but through some fluke I was passed over. I am caught in the thrall of the denial of death syllogism: other men die, I am not other men, therefore I cannot die. I live.

How would he die? Sparks and flashes of genius, profound realizations and insight dropping from his lips like polished gems or just the inevitable downhill curve into entropy, excitement in the cells satiated and static, the white noise of nothing. He looked down at his feet, one step at a time. What does a man think about when he is going to die? The most mundane of things. Not his legacy, not how he will be viewed once he is gone. His shoelace was untied, not to mention that he was missing

the other shoe. The meeting he had with a tax lawyer and how all that big money he had been awarded had strings attached, that he would once again find himself impoverished and scuffling. That cup of coffee he might be enjoying along with a few carefree thoughts. Laundry, always laundry, down to his last pair of clean briefs. His finger nails needed trimming as did his hair. And there was Pedro Contraras, Pete the Contrarian, in his barber shop on Sanchez and Market. Anything anyone said, he had a contradiction. He always said the same thing after a haircut: "You got nice hair, it cuts well. You got hair like a Mexican."

I have always followed my own path side-stepping the golden road for my own uncertain cobble more at ease at a pace that is my own, unhurried in the process though unsure of its eventuality, confident that it will end somewhere.

The parking lot was empty and he stood there for a moment, uncertain. A few cars and trucks whizzed by on the highway with obviously no intention of stopping. The windows of the Emporium were dark, the pale false front colored by the setting sun as were the coastal hills beyond outlined by a rapidly darkening orange. There were lights in among the shadowy folds of the hillside, or they might have been windows reflecting the last of the daylight, perhaps one of them belonging to Angie and Samantha's home. Angie never got his messages. Or had ignored them. But he didn't want to think that. Or maybe she tried returning his call to a nonfunctioning cell phone. The wind stiffened at the top of the bluff, knifing through the thin blanket enclosing his shoulders, and deepened his despair. He had retrieved his wallet, stuffed it with soggy bills, his bank card and ID. He had one cigarette left and his never die lighter. He didn't care about the rest. He could at least recover some semblance of himself if not his dignity, ironically, with money. He cast around as if an answer to his dilemma would be presented somewhere among the pale windswept grasses and spiny shrubs. A trail marker pointed the direction to *Bear's Head Lookout* just off the parking lot. He followed it to find himself peering down at the waves and the very spot among the rocks he had just vacated.

What will they say about me when I'm gone? "He was a bit of a bastard and a bit of a genius too. He could be an egotistical drunk and even *he* hated his guts." Some might even say I was being too easy on myself. Besides when I imagine someone saying something about me, they never say anything I don't already know. I die.

*In the Romanticism of his inclination* at the precipice there emerged a disheveled chitchat. Like Empedocles, he would leave his sandals on the cliff and gaze toward Abendland, the vesperal land of sundown and freedom. How an eddy of fire roars suddenly from the setting of the sun.

"One must die a man to be a man," a voice spoke to him, "The death of the hero resembles the setting sun" Although Pindar's poems were already reduced to silence by the disinclination of the multitude for elegant learning, at least he remembered a final stanza from the Odes.

*Creatures for a day! What is a man?  
 What is he not?  
 A mortal's dream of a shadow.  
 But when there comes to men  
 A gleam of splendor given of heaven,  
 Then rests on them a light of glory  
 And blessed are their days*

He paraphrased Browning: "Just when I think I'm safest, there's sunset's touch." A daunting distance is death as is the sunset the hero rides off into. "That courageous and tremulous sunset, indivisible! Like an arrow shot through the heart, kimo sabe," Tonto spoke. But then what did Shaw say? "Death is easy. It's comedy that's hard." Or Dylan Thomas' famous last joke, "I've had eighteen straight whiskeys. I think that's a record." Death is cruel when it comes right in the middle of writing something. Did Goethe understand when he called for "More light!" that it was death's encroaching shroud shadow and not that the wick on his lamp needed trimming?

Thoreau's dying delirium produced not unexpectedly "Moose Indian" as was Alfred Jarry's "bring me a toothpick" appropriately blasé and nonplussed. Nor will a dying wish necessarily be honored as Kafka's "burn everything I have written" proves. The last gasp is the final opportunity to admonish the world as Joyce did, echoing the sentiments of all writers throughout the ages: "Nobody gets it." The last time he spoke with Dorian Pillsbury, the old epicurean had complained, "This new medication kills my appetite so I might as well die. I'm not going to suffocate, I'm going to starve to death!" Toward Dick Granahan's last days they had traded famous last words in a desperate dark humored denial of the inevitable. Granahan obviously had the upper hand as he had been preoccupied for some time with what his last words might be as well as what people would say about him once he'd passed. The dying poet had served up a fragment from Lucretius, "Therefore death is nothing to us," He had lobbed back with Chesterton's "Desire life like water yet drink death like wine." His old friend backhanded a classic with Voltaire's well known "Now is not a good time to be making new enemies." He in turn volleyed with Wilde's deathbed words: "My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. One or the other of us has to go." Granahan, in an academic aside, reminded him that it was Rabelais who said "I am setting off to seek a vast perhaps." And he had parried with the opinion that it was a mistranslation from the medieval French and that it should have been translated as "a vast perhaps not." They had also speculated on what the last words of Orpheus might have been. "What's that howling?" Or when he spied the maenads approaching, "Yikes!"

***When I still held the idea*** that I would end up in the ground like everyone else, I wanted the quote from Tristan Shandy on my tombstone, *De Gustibus non disputandum est*. I'll settle for *I am not done reading*. Now more like the Icarus of my previous days I'm tempted to fly into the sun but reborn in my epiphany as Daedalus, I hesitate, my shadow tangled around my feet. The owl of Minerva flies at dusk,

something that Daedalus should have reminded Icarus, when the sun's effect on wax wings is diminished. Where does that leave me? People don't want the soul-fashioned-out-of-thin-air stuff anymore. They want conceptual and commercial or tritely trendy tried and true. No soaring on wax wings, no clambering up to a seventh heaven, no leaps off of cliffs, metered feet fitted with the conventional cement of sensible shoes.

So who is the one called Wendt? To whom the mail is addressed, whose name appears as a byline or on the title page of books and in discussions on the art of poetry. It would not be obvious just by looking at him that he was well known as a poet although in the eyes of some he was a poseur, a mountebank, a throwback, a full-time charlatan. As it was, he recognized himself less in his own books than he did in those of others. His life was a flight from himself. Everything he ever was or could be was lost to inevitable oblivion. He couldn't even remember which one of his selves has written this. Ink like blood flows in the slow spill of a lifelong intellectual sacrifice or suicide.

To be successful you have to believe in something. At the very least, yourself. I am too skeptical of everything, even myself, to be truly successful. I follow Descartes' original proposition, *dubito ergo sum*, I doubt therefore I am. Even my small successes are not my own, but that of others who see something in my work, something worthwhile. Moments of faith have allowed me to write and being able to write allowed me faith. Yet I undermine it all by my lack of conviction beyond that original instance of creation. I'm only as good as my next poem. And a poem is just another bread crumb in the journey through the deep dark forest. The older I get the more I realize that it's not just that the competition gets better, it also get cuter. As Granahan once advised, "If all you got is technique, you ain't got much." Rationalizing with every breath, I follow the way of why, seeking the answer, any answer. But it's always someone else's answer and I hate being told what to do. Imprisoned behind the solitude of a fervent smile I am a virulent fever passing through a lukewarm crowd as my natural cowardice shrinks from the occasion. I mythologize my life to give it meaning at the most basic anthropomorphic level. Impatient with the slow return and low interest yield of poetry, impatient with a life that continually marginalizes me. Poets, like gypsies, are each about as welcome in polite society.

The wind riffled the edges of the army blanket wrapped round him lifting the free folds like the edges of a cape and in turn shuffled the neocortex rolodex between his ears and stopped at the appropriate citation. "It is he of the billowing greatcoat, Cedric Silkyshag." Or Lazlo Pierce, his alter ego lothario, expert in passion. How does the Iliad end? He was a refugee from the age of heroes.

I am the hero poet awakening the sleeping images of the future which can and must come forth from the night in order to give the world a new and better face. I am the enemy of the old ruling system, of the old cultural values. Poets are necessarily

anonymous. "I am a voice with no name," echo the ages. Poets should prize their anonymity.

No sign of Angie the high winding whine of gears shifted up into cruising speed streaking taillights down the twilight highway reminded him. Angela Rhona Notti, named after Angerona, goddess of the winter solstice, she who gives the wheel of light a kick to keep it moving, angel of night. He was abandoned, a sad gunny sack at the side of the road, or more accurately at the edge of a cliff. Groggy from the effects of the pain killer and beer he leaned forward as if that would offer a better view of his predicament, numbly unconcerned. "When I die nothing of our love will have existed." He had no idea where that came from.

The absurd excitability of my system which forces me to create crisis out of every experience and puts drama into the smallest incidents of life makes it impossible to count on me in any way. I am no longer a poet. And then I am. At most I am a rendezvous of poets who, from time to time, appear as that one or this one with cocky insistence. For this very reason, like in some grade B western I find myself riding off into the sunset. Destiny imposes its own consistency and my thoughts and wishes are but a pretext for what I find myself doing. No passion, no act of heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling will preserve my life beyond the grave. All the labors of all my days, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of my genius are destined for extinction in the vast solar munch, and the whole edifice of my literary achievement will inevitably be buried with me. A poet once wrote, "When I die I want to be buried in a book." Needless to say, it was his own book. The Fates do not have "needless" in their vocabulary. Death is the ultimate defining instance. To live in the present is to live facing death. Man invented eternity and the future to escape death, but each of these inventions is a fatal trap. Only in facing death is life really life. Within the now, death is not separated from life. Both are the same reality. The search for immortality is a dead end in the labyrinth of existence. Spray painted on the bricks of its walls is the graffiti *You Ain't Going Nowhere*. Death chews us up from the moment of birth, masticating till it can swallow us whole, and then shits us back out into a hole in the ground.

***The blanket slipped from a shoulder and the dying breath*** of sunset pushed against his chilled torso, pulled at his sodden sanded hair. "I'm rich! I'm Famous! Why aren't I happy with that? I'm great? I'm not telling myself anything I don't already know." And that caused him to cackle knowingly. He imagined the mess he must look. "Pride goeth before the fall," he breathed. He just wished this day would end. Even if there was no guarantee of another one? Even. He was nothing, when he should have been everything. The search for absolute beauty is the quest of death, the exercise of reason's constant critique of mortality. From a technical point of view, the world is comical. Death knells come cheap.

I tell my life to myself as dreams, images, fantasies, and an array of deliberate states reflective of the vast inherent power of cerebral activity underlying consciousness. What I speak is never the absolute truth. It's either a half truth or a truth and a half. I

understand now that I am essentially a monologist in poet's clothing. First of all, the monologue is an art without an audience. And without an audience, the expressions of artist and art don't exist. It is an art of forgetting and of forgetting me as a function that eliminates the subject, indifferent to the outcome. In this boundless universe everything is arranged according to the principle of cosmic necessity as a manifestation without self-consciousness. My monologue begets the world itself. The boundaries of art are breached yet no originality is attempted because to try to treat the monologue in terms of esthetics is pointless. The eternal monologue that accompanies my consciousness overcomes all obstacles and concentrates much too much in every nuance, in the steady erotic connection with language only possible in perfect solitude. All distraction disappears and nothing remains but a hidden maze and the echo of fragments in endless pursuit of each other. I don't know of any more profound difference in the whole orientation of an artist, whether I look at my work in progress, essentially at myself, from the point of view of a witness or whether I have forgotten the world, simply humming a tune to myself.

As a child he'd once caught a striped turtle in the creek while staying with his father on the commune for the summer. He took it home to Indianapolis when the school year began. He had named it The City of Clay Flowers. Was it an indication of his future poetic talents? Or maybe Peggy, his mother, had called it that. The turtle was in the habit of leaving gray amorphous lumps in various corners around the house. Maybe he had misheard and she had really named it the "shitter of clay flowers."

Well, it's been going this way for a while, impatient with the inevitable, I want to hurry it along, don't cry for me Argentina or Paraguay or Slovenia or Madagascar. It's been a great ride, and I got everything I deserved, good and bad, and maybe a little something that belonged to someone else. And know that I loved you, all of you, but there was only so much I could give after I served myself. Thank you for your belief, your disbelief, your indulgence, your indifference. You won't get hurt if you stand back out of the way, look on objectively and consider it the end of an era, my era and error, a bid for freedom, me free of pain and suffering, you free of me and my pain and suffering.

He felt a chill that cooled his liver and made him shiver. "This is the way the world will end, in rays, red," Kerouac had dreamed, "silent, tired—the world of the mind is the real world—the rays of the mind, the real rays." The old king must die before a new one is born, his legacy his grand illusion.

Gazing at the dying sun, what anthropomorphic arrogance is it that steals the essence of cosmic eternity and absurdly imputes it to an immortal self? Why must I insist on combining the attributes of myself with that of the universe? To be a poet means to suffer reversals and calmly weigh the eventual terror and degradation of impotence at averting my own death, that of my family, friends, and lovers. And by extension, the death of a clueless feisty species, even the death of the planet, incubator of a vaunted sentience. And even at the death of its vital star, that bright orange dollop sinking into

the ironic sea. Will anyone mourn that in this place over a span of untold eons there once lived poetic intelligence?

He lit his last cigarette and stepped to the edge to relieve himself over the side. As he watched the unremitting froth of breakers spray phosphorescent arcs among the jagged dark shapes below, hypnotic in their mutability, his attention turned to the next swell of wave approaching as the edge of a mysterious and chimerical energy. And what exactly is the attraction of that shaped force consisting of undifferentiated particles caught up in concert until it breaks into the disarrayed individual wash of ephemeral droplets? It was all he could do not to join the cosmic undulation and become a part of it all. He was contributing a little of himself all the same, and which pretty much summed up his life as a poet, piss in the ocean.

I am as eternal as the universe and so the endless sea of matter, constantly unfolding enfolded forms, will find something else to do with me. Then my spirit should not be afflicted or frightened for I am this enchanted unity stable in my oneness and will remain so eternally. I am a non-symbolic thing signifying what I am. Those who consider the divine one thing and I another do not know. I is another, the rest is silence.

He recalled an old blues lyric “don’t the sun look good going down over the double tree.” But then the sun doesn’t necessarily always set, sometimes it just disappears. Nightfall is no mere failure of sunlight. He waited for it, the green flash, the exact instant that the sun plummets into the sea. “Adios, you who watched the sun go down. . . smiling.” He smiled to himself surprised to have summoned up of the last line in *Visions of Cody*. “Adios, King.” Yes, adios to this sweet shadow which beneath the surface makes things visible from the moment of birth but is the immediacy of death redoubling the world like a peeled orange. “The night is now!” he proclaimed as if in command. He looked out over the darkening expanse and the thought of it filled him with dread. It was a vast graveyard of everything that ever lived. And below, set afloat by the encroaching tide, his satchel bobbing on a swell like a drunken boat bound for China. He found himself at the edge of the cliff in the classic “*reculer pour mieux sauter*” situation, as if pulling back for a better leap was the answer. “A word, a word, my kingdom for a word” he shouted his desperate parody above the roar of the beast filled sea. But nothing. Silence. The motion of the ocean. The undulating carpet of animated water. “Life!” he cried, “for is there nothing sweeter granted us mortals than this life in the sunlight?” If happiness is the quality that sums up the whole of life then its realization must wait until it finds completion in death. He reminded himself that Nietzsche had once said “Human beings do not desire happiness, only Englishmen desire happiness.” Life is a horizontal free fall. When faced with death, everything is a loose end.

Unseen, unrelated, inconceivable, uninferable, unimaginable, indescribable essence of self common to all consciousness in which all ceases as peace, bliss, not me nor I.

The image came to him of lemmings leaping en masse off a cliff into the sea. He was the last lemming, late for his own demise. Name is the guest of reality and he'd overstayed his welcome.

Death is inherently personal. It called him by name. "Death."

Death stands above me, whispering low I know not what into my ear.

A screech of brakes followed the squeal of tires. A slammed car door brought him out of his reverie. The headlight beams hit him square in the back, projecting his fleeting shadow onto the scrim of mist. His impulse was to reach after it. The updraft pushed against his chest as if it were enough to hold him aloft. He took note of the stark naked weeds in the artificial light at the edge of the cliff where it gave way.

beams

    fleeting

        reach

            aloft

                naked

                    artificial

                        edge

As accomplice to the rising wind, a desperate voice cried out,

**"WENDT!!"**