Dream Yard Drone & Love Story

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When the @*&! is present in the universe, The horses haul manure. When the @*&! is absent from the universe, War horses are bred outside the city.

- Lao Tsu, Tao Te Ching (author's edit)

Part One



I wish I could invite you out here. Although, come to think of it, I'm not sure you'd really like it. Anyway, it doesn't matter. I can't invite you. I don't have any invitations left. You only get so many see, and I sent out the last one about a year ago. You'd think I'd be lonely by now. Well I don't know, maybe I am. It's hard to say, you know sadness is just sadness. I'm either sad or I'm not. You know better than anyone that loneliness is just sadness adorned by specificity and definition. It's a bit pretentious if you ask me. My point is, I feel all right, I'm not so sad, not most of the time, so don't spend so much time worrying about me. And for god's sake, please stop telling people I'm dead. Dead is such a silly word anyway. Dead, what the hell is that supposed to mean?

From the looks of your last letter, it seems that you haven't understood much of anything I've told you. I've given it some thought, and I've come up with some advice for you. Here it is: if by chance you encounter a piece of imagery while reading my letters, I encourage you to examine it through a kaleidoscope, magnifying glass, telescope, or perhaps the lens of your grandmother's cataract. Any of these helpful tools will bring you closer to the truth of my words than you could ever achieve with your naked mind's eye.

I hope this helps.

I've been meaning to tell you about the sunflowers. Don't forget your kaleidoscope. They're beautiful and strong, even in unexpected frosts. They grow tall and gaze toward the sun steadily, like the flight of a perfect origami airplane. I've also been meaning to tell you about the drone.

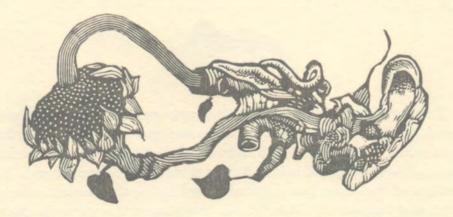
For the last several years it seems the yard has been experiencing the unfortunate disruption of a horrible awful very bad drone buzz moan thug coming from across the border (your side of the border that is). Perhaps you've noticed it yourself, although, I sincerely doubt it. It seems that people living within the drone, and those producing the drone, become immune to its deeply discomforting effect. On our side of the border however, the drone has been causing quite the ruckus. For the last year or so, the weekly Yard Hall meetings have been filled to the brim in an attempt to come up with some kind of solution for the drone. I can't remember ever seeing so many folks riled up all together, all at once. Too bad you can't get your people riled up like this, about war or exploitation, or the incredulous song of a sunflower, perhaps. Wouldn't that be lovely? Anyway the meetings have become quite a sight to see. The committee rings and dings, the judges pound down their fists, and the befuddled public huffs and puffs. The whole ordeal has become so loud and obnoxious (almost loud and obnoxious enough to drown out the drone), that we have begun waking the sleepers.



Perhaps I haven't mentioned the sleepers to you but as you might guess, they don't like to be woken up. They moan and groan and whine. They kick and scream. Their cheeks bunch up into wretched balls of anger and their once soft faces disappear behind furrowed brows and clenched jaws. The problem of the drone had to be addressed before the sleepers woke up again, and that was that. After all, the last thing we'd want to do around here is disturb the peace. So we've gotten down to business and started brainstorming a plan. What could possibly be done about that horrible awful very bad drone buzz moan thug coming from across the border?

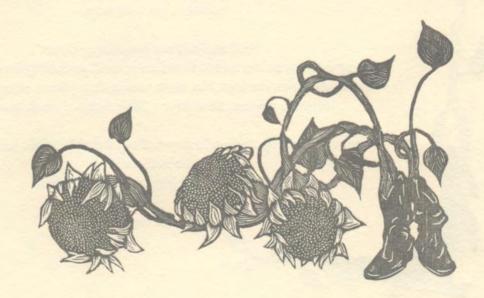
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Flint and Lou, our yard experts, have completed the official drone investigation. They held a number of interviews. Almost everyone in the yard put in their two cents, but it was the sunflowers that actually had something valuable to offer. They proposed to grow a wall (a wall of sunflowers, that is) on the border, so that the drone would not seep into the yard. We liked the idea. It turns out, and I remember reading this in a book a very long time ago, that the great sunflower is actually much like the worm in that it can eat plain old dirt and poop out something much more valuable. The sunflower contains a filter, which specializes not in dirt, but in long undulating energy waves: sound that is. Its great sun worshiping petals absorb the dull buzzes and dreary drones produced by mundane and hopeless lifestyles. The experts indicate that the sunflower is so hopeful and so exciting that it is capable of absorbing sounds even as terrible as the drone coming from your life right now. As if that's not enough wonderful news, it seems that from the horrible awful drone a sunflower is capable of producing a beautiful and ethereal song, which feeds our wind (whom I must say has been relentlessly complaining of hunger all night long for at least a decade).

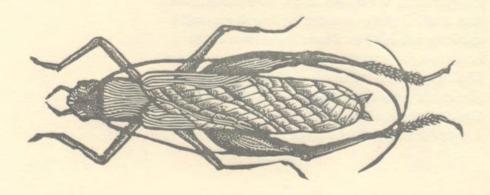


All in all, the idea is that by growing the wall of sunflowers we'll filter out the horrible terrible lifeless drone that seeps in from your side of the border, and at the same time, feed the wind. Big news, right? I think so.

I guess you've probably noticed that it's been some time since I've mentioned Ellen. As you may or may not remember I used to mention her all the time. I used to tell you of her high forehead and the way she would furrow her brow for no understandable reason. I used to write about her pronounced cheekbones and the way she stood with her hands on her hips, with her feet spread and arranged to fit perfectly in a pair of softened cowgirl boots. These days I don't say much about that at all. If you're wondering how she is, well I think she's doing fine. I hear she's down at the border working on the sunflower-planting project. She's very dedicated to the sunflowers. We all are. She doesn't give a shit about me anymore though. She doesn't even give a shit enough to come tell me why she doesn't give a shit about me.



She did say one thing before she stopped coming over though. She said, "Huck, I can't stand this shit anymore." And then she said, "You take yourself so seriously." And then she said, (and see if you can decode this one), "You're not even real, you know?" Well I didn't know what the hell she meant by that, so I said, "What?"



And she just sighed a big long sigh, as if she had just settled into a hot bath. She was sitting on the bed, rubbing her thighs like she was cold, but it doesn't get cold here.

And she had her head hung down

staring intently at her naked femaleness, as if searching for some abnormality between her legs, but there was nothing there except the usual morning cricket, tired after a long night of choir practice.

Then she stood up and walked out of my humble home just as naked as she had come. For a moment it seemed awfully dark.

I understand now why it was so dark that day. It was on that day that the blackness started seeping into my home. I realize I haven't told you about the blackness in previous letters. I guess I figured you wouldn't understand. But, now that you have your kaleidoscope (or something to that extent) on hand, I hope that it will be a more accessible concept. The truth is I'm not exactly sure how to describe the blackness to you but I'll do my best. It's a sort of condition from which I suffer, although it's not so painful as it might sound, in fact its quite peaceful, only slightly disturbing. It's a sort of still darkness that comes to me, swallows me, and leaves me motionless for days sometimes. When the darkness leaves me I find myself quite grumpy and out of sorts, but at least I'm myself again. I haven't told anyone but you about this. I'm not sure whom else to tell. I would tell Ellen but she never comes around anymore, and I'd feel strange going all the way down to the borderlands just to tell Ellen about the blackness. I don't know what she'd think of me then.

I've decided to go down to the borderlands after all. I hear that some of the sunflowers have begun to grow tall now. I hear that when the sunflowers sing their song they sound like old women laughing mischievously. I can't think of any sound more intriguing. I hear that the wind has been feasting on the sound, and blowing strong thankful gusts toward the giant windmill to the east. That's what the others tell me at least. I'd like to see for myself, and I'd like to see Ellen.

The blackness came to me this morning just as I finished making my coffee. When I came to, the coffee was cold. Damn it, I thought. And, I couldn't help but consider that the blackness began the day that Ellen left me. I'm sure she has something to say about that.



I remember one time I tried to lend her this book. She thought the book was really important to me because I was always bringing it everywhere, picking it up and reading it any chance I got. It's this book I brought with me when I first came out here. You probably saw it sitting on my coffee table or next to my bed when you used to come over to my old apartment. I don't miss that apartment. It was stuffy and full of drone, even if I didn't notice it then. I didn't even read the damn book when I lived there. I just let it float around the place like some daunting reminder of my lack of selfmotivation. There it was in the kitchen, there it was in the bedroom, there it was by the front door, and there it was in my coat pocket. I was on page eleven. I loved it, but I couldn't make it past page eleven. I could never get

through more than half a book back then, and I hated myself for it. You might like to know that I don't hate myself so much here. I only hate myself sometimes, but not so often as I used to. Now it's more like slight irritation when it comes, instead of pure hatred and vengeance. Anyway, back to what I was saying. I wanted to lend her this book, but she said it was too important to me. She refused it. Women always refuse gifts right before they leave you. I should have seen it coming.



It was this book that was written by this guy who lived so long ago I don't think he even lived to hear the drone. Lucky kid. Back then, even normal folks like you knew about the borderlands, and they wouldn't have needed kaleidoscopes to see the sunflowers. There wasn't even any need for cataracts. This guy wrote about swift horses drawing dung-carts, not drone. He warned that if @*&! was forgotten, warhorses would breed in the borderlands. I believe the guy. Warhorses do breed especially well in the warm climate produced by the drone. I however only sunburn, blister, and peel. Don't you remember how my mom would rub me down with sunscreen three times a day during the summer? I hated that shit. I hated the way it got stuck in the webbing of my fingers and toes. That's another reason I've been worrying a little about my trip to the borderlands. Wherever the drone is stronger, which it is at the borderlands, the sun sends stronger light rays. Lou and Flint, the experts, say this is because the sun has also become agitated with the drone, and in her anger has begun showering your side of the border with light rays hot enough to burn. Have you noticed?

I can't say I've only been worried about sunburns. That would be a lie. Lies don't really fly around here. I've been worried about seeing Ellen. I might even go so far as to say I've been worried about being sunburned and seeing Ellen at the same time. Is that very vain of me? Well what the hell, maybe I'm a little vain. I'm also worried because I love her and miss her and I feel very serious about these things. But I wouldn't want her to see the seriousness on my face and think that I'm taking myself too seriously. After all, that's what I understand she doesn't like about me.

I am worried, but not too worried to go. You see, I've already begun planning the trip. At last night's Yard Hall meeting I announced that I would go to the borderlands to see for myself the beauty of the sunflowers, and hear for myself the song, and feel for myself the grateful gusts of wind. Everyone approved. Flint drew me a map of the yard so that I might find my way with no trouble at all. The children have already begun writing my departure song. They will come to my house tomorrow morning when my bags are packed to perform it.



"He's off to see the mighty flower To hear the mighty song To feel the mighty gusts of wind He seeks his love all wrong.

Be weary of a blackness You may have never seen It might steal you forever If you don't awake in dream

Be weary of the drone Who floods the dead with memories If you fall asleep too soon You'll wake too late to see.

He's off to see the mighty flower To hear the mighty song To feel the mighty gusts of wind He seeks his love all wrong.

We have faith in your journey We have faith in you to dream We have little faith in you at all But we have faith all the same." These were the words to the departure song that the children performed for me today at my doorstep. Now, I haven't lived here long, but I have heard quite a few children's songs in my day and I think this one was meant to frighten the hell out of me. It's not looking good for your old bud Huck.



P.S. How do the children know about the blackness? I would have asked them if they hadn't been so quick to run for it. I bet they went to their hideout.

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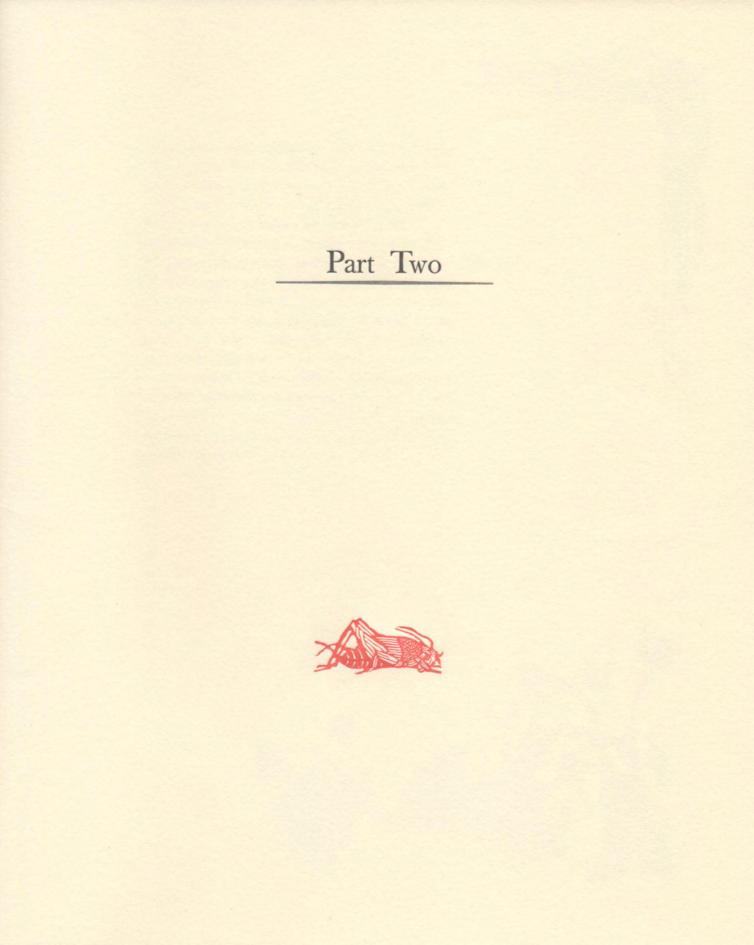
I've been thinking about that song a lot. I haven't left my house yet. I've been busy trying to track down the children so that I'd be able to ask them a load of questions about what they said in that song. I checked out the map that Flint gave me. The children's hideout isn't on it. Of course not, it wouldn't be much of a hideout then, would it?

I've been studying the map quite a bit though, and I've decided to head out this afternoon. There's no use sitting in the bathtub thinking about that song any longer. I'm starting to look like an old elephant.

First stop: the windmill. From there I can cross the great hill into the valley of the borderlands. They say from there I should just follow the sweet smell of the sunflower song.







I've been a little distracted out here, or I would have written sooner. Sorry to keep you on the edge of your seat like that, wondering if I had made the journey safely and all. On the yard map the journey looked like quite a journey. Truth is, it only took me one full day of walking. I stopped at the windmill for lunch. I had packed three sack lunches for the journey. I ate them all at the foot of the windmill.

The windmill told me a story. I'll tell it to you some other time.

I'm in the sunflowers now, planting sunflowers. We have to transplant each individual sunflower child into the sunflower-prepared earth. The sunflowers grow very fast in the hot sun of the borderlands. Sometimes I just sit and watch them grow. I try to determine whether they grow from the top or from the bottom. Flint and Lou would call me silly. Flint and Lou would say they grow from everywhere all at once. I just can't grasp it, you know?

Ellen is close by. She is planting sunflowers too. I like to watch her plant sunflowers. I like to imagine I am the sunflower in her hands. I am the sunflower in her hands, and she handles me carefully so as to not disturb my fragile roots. She places me in the soil and she tucks me in. It always makes me smile to imagine that. The imagination is nice, isn't it? When Ellen looks at me I am usually looking at her. When she looks at me looking at her, she usually smiles.

I have been here in the sunflowers quite a long time. All that time I wasn't writing you I was here, planting sunflowers and loving Ellen. Maybe it was a week or a month, you would know better than me how much time it was. We don't do much with time around here.

Time is one thing I really don't miss about my old apartment. I remember I used to have a clock in every room so that I would always be aware of time's presence. I needed time then the way I need Ellen now I suppose. That's the only way I can make sense of it.

So anyway, a lot has happened to me in that time. I have happened upon a lot. Most of all, I have happened upon a long dream, a very long dream called *Death*.



Ellen said when two people dream, when four people dream, when seven people dream, when one thousand sunflowers dream and one large windmill dreams at the same time, they can all dream together in the same dream yard. Ellen said that while she was lying in bed at the workers barracks at the borderlands. I heard her say it, because I was lying right next to her, my fingertips tapping the bare skin of her belly. Her belly felt soft, it still does. I like that. That night we went to sleep and dreamed one small dream inside one very long dream. That morning when we woke up Ellen asked me, "Huck?"

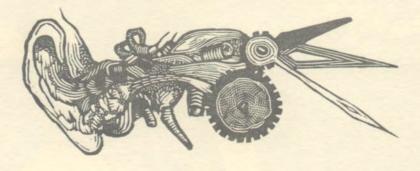
> "Yeah?" I said "What did you dream in your small dream?" And I said, "It's a secret," Her inquisitiveness always made me nervous. And she said, "Don't take yourself so seriously." "Yeah well, okay alright, I'll tell you. Fine." I give in pretty easily "I dreamed of making love to you," I said. She smiled and she said something nice in return. She said, "Let's dream that dream together." So we did, very, very quietly, as to not wake the other workers still dreaming small dreams near by.

> > In the morning we walked to the very edge of the borderlands. Ellen wanted to show me how beautiful the warhorses were.

Many years ago, they tell me, there were very few warhorses. It is true that they have multiplied into many. It is also true that they run and snarl and pace back and forth.

Nowadays, one can watch them from a distance. We watched them for many hours. They are majestic – not because of their long flowing manes or because of their pronounced muscular systems galloping gracefully in the wind, but because of their silver armor that clinks and clanks and dings and dongs like an old cathedral's bells. There are thousands and thousands and thousands of sunflowers planted now. The sunflower choir sings very softly, just loud enough for the wind to hear. Every now and then we all stop our work, stand amongst the

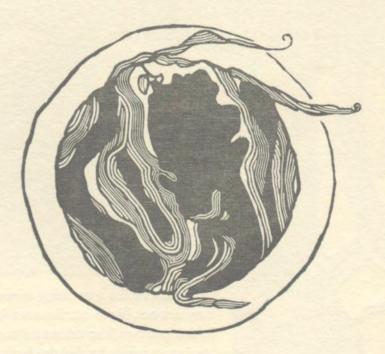
sunflowers, and listen. They sing cackling, calling and giggling. We don't have to stop our work and stand quietly to hear the drone though. The drone, as you might imagine, is very strong here. It is quite sickening to the endocrine system, and if Ellen weren't here, and I hadn't just come to the conclusion that I am living a very long dream called Death, I think I'd be quiet a grump. Actually, I probably wouldn't be writing you at all. I wouldn't have anything nice to say.



Plant a sunflower... vvvvvvvvvmmmmmmm... Smile at Ellen..... shhhhhhhhhuuuuuuum. It sounds like a refrigerator, an air conditioner, and a freeway all singing together in a church choir. Well, you get it.

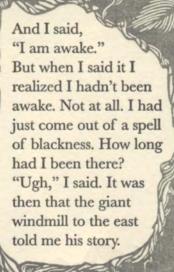
I have to confess something to you, I may not be able to continue writing you in this manner. The others tell me that my letters might be slightly detrimental to my recovery from the blackness syndrome. It's hard to explain really. I hardly understand it myself.

Today I went to the river with Ellen. We stood on the foot bridge and stared down at the water for a very long time. Each rapid was the wrinkled skin beneath my old man's eyes, skin that crinkled and lifted in a curious squint, skin that stretched and broadened in a wide-eyed surprise.



My old man was a good storyteller. You never knew which parts were fiction and which parts were true. You couldn't tell because it didn't matter. Which reminds me, I've been meaning to tell you a story. It goes like this. Don't forget the opaque lenses of your grandmother's cataract. The windmill called out to me in a deep gusty voice:

"WAKE UP!"

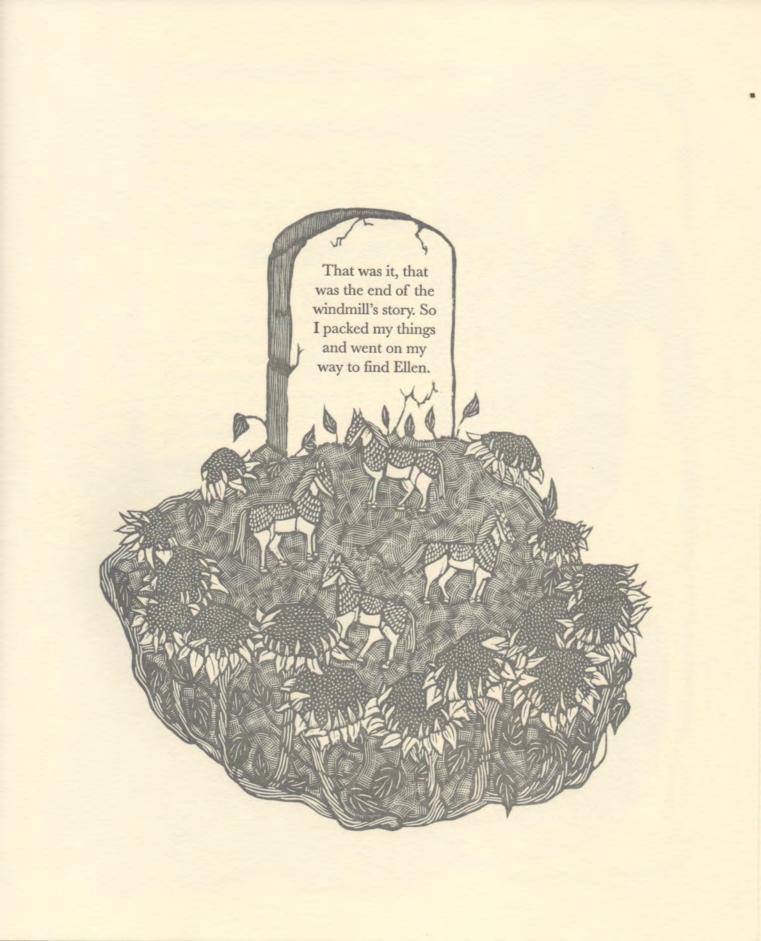




He said, "I will tell you this story within a story within a story. It may bore you, but you will thank me when I have finished." The giant windmill spoke very slowly, so slowly in fact that it was not particularly easy to understand him. His words were covered in stretch marks and blurred by an underlying wind-whoosh. One must listen very closely to make sense of a windmill. So, that's what I did. And I did it for a very long time, until it was well past dark, I had eaten all my sack lunches, and I had to get going, so that I could find the worker's barracks before I got too tired to stand. The windmill called out his story in gusts and I swallowed it in guzzles.

"The one who sits here beneath my great oars, the one who sits to eat his lunch in peace, three times over, on a journey to see his love amongst the sunflowers, the one who has slept many a moment unaware of his dreamless sleep, the one who dreams only blackness at times and wakes up when his coffee has gone cold; has lived a dream called death many years now without awakening in his dream. He has gone on living, dreaming, as if he were not dreaming death. As if he were dreaming life. He who dreams life during death leaves behind the great humor that manifests in death's dream yard. He who dreams life during death begins to die again, because the living must always die. And so, he who stands before me, dies again before me in a sleep that only the sleepers sleep, a dreamless sleep of blackness, and so I call to him WAKE UP! And, I say furthermore, you're dead god damn it, and isn't it nice to know it!"





This book is a collaboration: Alison Jean Kinney composed the text in 2008 in Eugene, Oregon; Lauren Rose Kinney designed, engraved, printed, and hand bound the pages in Tempe, Arizona in 2010-11. The text is Baskerville printed from polymer plates and hand-set type on Rives Heavyweight paper. All of the images are original wood engravings. We would like to thank our family, Katie & Solomon, Patrick Vincent, John Risseeuw, and the Sunflowers for their support.

This book is number of 34.