

Are you sure you're all right?

Or

Don't you think the world's dead freaky, cos it makes itself?

Or

Without contraries is no progression

Or

The Whole is not in Hazard

or

If it's daytime, it must be playtime

There can be no power or god in the whole that is concerned for any one thing, though there may be a power concerned for the whole. (Fowles)

But if there is no end, and only in an infinite universe can there be no end, then you, from whatever world or age you come, and I are equal. [...] It was never created and it will never end, so that all that is may be equal in it. (Fowles)

The cosmos stretches around me, meadow on meadow of galaxies, reach on reach of dark space, steppes of stars, oceanic darkness and light. There is no amenable good in it, no particular concern or particular mercy. Yet everywhere I see a living balance, a rippling tension, an enormous yet mysterious simplicity, an endless breathing of light. And I comprehend that being is understanding that I must exist in hazard but that the whole is not in hazard. (Fowles)

"It is the health of the planet that matters, not that of some individual species of organisms." (Lovelock)

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages has different names; it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren. (John Woolman)

Author's Note

Thank you for picking up this book. I'm flattered.

This book could never have been written if it was not for the help given to me by others. I suggest you put this down and go and find them. You are better off spending time with them, than with me.

The Aristos - John Fowles

Gravity and Grace – Simone Weil

Valis – Philip K. Dick

Still here? Look, there's really not much point reading this. Please start a journal instead. Just write down what you think and feel. It's important. You don't have to do it everyday or anything. Just whenever you feel like it but, you know, regularly. Make it a habit.

Hello? Yes? Can I help you? What?

Maybe you are stuck in a holiday cottage and can't find those other, more worthwhile, books. Maybe this is the only book around. If, for whatever reason, you still feel like reading this, then I am very grateful to you and hope you enjoy it.

1

After an invigorating weekend at an NLP training event, Eugene Dual sat on the train listening to his MP3 player. He'd been trying to do resource anchoring. He pinched his right ear lobe - hard. And began.

I've been spending a lot of time thinking about what will last. How can I be sure that the message will get through to the far future? I could run an advert in the local press. It wouldn't cost too much and maybe some future historian would pick it up. But that wouldn't be of much use to me. I need my message to get into the hands of a future sociologist, or perhaps a physicist.

The internet is a possibility, but very impermanent. All sorts of things could threaten it. Some sort of breakdown in the system (or The System!). A new dark age. Even a new ice-age. No, it has to be something more reliable. I need to carve my proposal into stone or something.

Maybe a university. They survived a long time, through wars and rebellions. If only I could afford to put up a little satellite or something. The problem is the idea sounds a bit unhinged, and yet everything depends upon the recipients believing me to be sane.

Train journeys are great opportunities. You don't have to drive. You can get a coffee and

sit at a table to read and write. There's no pressure to speak to anyone, although there are sometimes interesting people around. Once Eugene was sat opposite a small girl writing in a small book that she'd evidently made herself. It claimed to be a "Spell Book" and the hand lettered cover was stitched on with string. Something about this seemed important to him as he looked up from what he was reading without appearing to notice anything. This child seems to have the right idea, he thought.

Wearing headphones gives one a kind of invisibility: we need a new word here. People think that other people's headphones drop a cloak of inaudibility over them. But they don't know how loud your music is, or where the gaps between songs are. It's easy to tune in to a piece of conversation. On this occasion, though, Gene was not interested in eavesdropping. His own thoughts were quite absorbing enough. In front of him on the table lay a notebook, opened at a page which already held a few lines of spidery writing below a neatly underlined title. He'd developed the habit of taking notes on everything some years ago. This was connected to a slightly paranoid theory he had developed. This is the formulation he came up with in his journal.

You missed it.

The total answer was in a book you read, gave away and forgot about.

The song that might have saved you was on a B-side you never listened to.

The lover you split up with over a minor disagreement was actually the one.

You will spend the rest of your life looking, but you'll never find these things again.

So, Gene recorded things carefully. Thoughts that seemed noteworthy. Phrases from books he wanted to remember, song-lyrics, things people said in his hearing on public transport. Random images – a Buddhist monk eating cake outside a cafe in the summertime in Scotland in 2008. From these fragments he knew somehow he could construct meaning. The answers are around us. Heraclitus wrote that the nature of things loves to hide itself. He stored notebooks and reviewed them often. He distilled the essence, the quanta of meaning, in files on his computer. He printed them out and carried them with him. A personal scripture. He organised, structured, edited. And always he added more, always kept going further back and further forward. Re-reading the books he read as a child, following up hints in bibliographies, reading lists, recommendations in footnotes and conversations. He was aiming for a state like that of a supersaturated solution. His mind literally supersaturated by thought. Then when he came into contact with The Seed (something around which all his

ideas could crystallise) he would be ready. What he loved most were those moments when there's an insight. Something becomes clear. It might be something quite ordinary, but a moment can become illuminated, perfectly clear and defined. A couple more things slot into place, some of the inter-connections become clearer. Something like that happened on this day. Eugene decided he was finished with trying to think of the best way to ensure his message would get through to its intended audience. Instead, he would just bombard the future with many copies of his proposal, his offer.

Gene got off the train at his station and walked home. On his way through the living room, he peered in at his rats. They were asleep in their hammock, but opened their eyes, yawned and stretched as he stood watching for a moment. He felt hungry and decided to make something to eat. He just fancied oven chips and baked beans. Gene put his rucksack on one of the kitchen tables, as if it was a dinner guest, and began to prepare dinner. As the oven warmed up, he made himself a hot drink. The NLP course had been intense. He was very excited by the idea of “outcomes” and decided to start right now making a list of things he wanted to achieve. He got his notebook out of his bag and placed it on the kitchen table, with his good pen by the side of it. The light on the oven blinked out. Eugene shook out chips onto a baking tray and slid them into the oven. He closed the door with his foot and executed a little turn; he liked spinning on his socks on the lino like one of those ballerinas that pop up when you open a jewellery box. Gene collected his tea and plonked himself in front of his book. He ruled a line and made a title on a clean page:

Outcomes

1. *lose a stone*
2. *travel to the future*
3. *get a dog*
4. *get into a relationship*
5. *be more creative*

Gene looked at his list and then pushed up from the table to put his beans on. Some time passed. While everything cooked, he quickly sorted the notes he'd taken at the course and filed them. He had lots of big brightly coloured ring-binders. They had file-separators and contents pages. This material he placed in one which was identified by a sticky label on its spine bearing the words: “Of Interest”.

Gene ate his dinner and looked over the list of outcomes. The worst thing about living

alone, he decided, was that he could not have a dog. It wasn't fair to leave a dog at home alone all day. He'd left two chips. Gene stood up and walked back into his living room once again. His rats were wide awake now and sniffing the air with interest: they loved cooked potato. Gene opened up the cage and put the chips in the salad-ball. Meg was there like a shot, dragging the chip down like to eat it in the corner-potty on the lower level of the cage. Gene could not understand why she liked to eat there. Jack, a very different character, lazily reached out from the hammock and tugged the second chip. It came free of the salad-ball and Jack pulled it across to gnaw it in comfort, in bed.

2 – In which we meet Asymmetric Bob

Fasting feels like a stick stuck in my throat.
I'm in perfect balance around this empty centre.
starve / lie not-sleeping
cut / binge

There's a door behind which hides
the female serene.
I adore, I surrender.
Take me, I am yours.

Peel the dirty bandage. Cuts are fresh,
dark red lines seeping into grey ash.

3

The following advert appeared the next Thursday in the local newspaper. And every Thursday for several months. Gene got into the habit of leaving his “disclaimer” in a range of places. He wrote it in books he borrowed from the library. He cut it into the trunk of a tree in his local park. He left printed copies in places that might protect it for a few years, for instance under the corner of a carpet in a fascinating room full of stuffed animals in a nearby National Trust property when the attendant was not looking. One long bleak Sunday afternoon that Autumn, he carved it in rock at a nearby beauty spot. It read as follows:

I, Eugene Dual, want to travel in time. I am willing to be taken at any point in my life to any point in the future. I waive all rights existent in my time, or the time to come. I accept responsibility for any injury that occurs during such an experiment. In the case of my death, I hereby donate my body to the medical researchers of the future.

Gene found time-travel in films confusing. It's a confusing idea. Now that he'd seen the disclaimer in print he wondered about it. Why hadn't they come for him already? Given that he had written and published this proposal, why couldn't someone from the future have torn him from the time-stream before he'd put it in the Chronicle? Did it make any sense to say that if they had done that he would never have written the thing? Gene was not sure. But he decided he had spent enough time contemplating this paradox and so went out to the garage to check on his wormeries.

Gene felt that worms were seriously underrated by most people: Darwin credited them for the beauty of the landscape: "We should remember that its smoothness, on which so much of its beauty depends, is mainly due to all the inequalities having been slowly levelled by worms." People don't understand. Even Darwin had to deal with people who just didn't have the imagination to see this stuff.

In the year 1869, Mr. Fish rejected my conclusions with respect to the part which worms have played in the formation of vegetable mould, merely on account of their assumed incapacity to do much work. He remarks that 'considering their weakness and their size, the work they are represented to have accomplished is stupendous.' Here we have an instance of that inability to sum up the effects of a continually recurrent cause, which has often retarded the progress of science.

They are small but there's a lot of them. "It is a marvellous reflection that the whole of the superficial mould over any such expanse has passed, and will again pass, every few years, through the bodies of worms." (Darwin)

Why stop at worms? Lovelock: "The cuddly animals, the wild flowers and the people are to be revered, but they would be as nothing were it not for the vast infrastructure of the microbes."

In one of Eugene's notebooks the following phrase appears: "Don't you think the world's dead freaky, cos it makes itself?" One day he was been sitting behind some kids on a bus. He was writing and listening to music. In the gap between two songs he heard on of them say this. A teenage girl gave him this insight. The universe arranged itself for a moment so that he could hear this phrase. It was one of those days when he was writing fast about nothing in particular. He slotted her comment in. Untrained Gaia theorist gem. Compare Lovelock: "We live in a world that has been built by our ancestors, ancient and modern, and which is continuously maintained by all things alive today."

The secret to Eugene's thought process was simple: juxtaposition. He believed that by

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sifting and arranging he would find meaning. He was haunted by two possibilities:

a: He could spend his whole life collecting, going from one text to another, placing idea against idea. The process was infinite. Even if no-one ever wrote another relevant word, there would not be time to read and process everything that was relevant. And of course people kept writing new books, making images, dropping hints in conversation, making films and singing songs. It is madness to aim for a perfect, complete expression of *it*, whatever *it* is.

b: He would find it all coming together, like the supersaturated solution forming around The Seed. He would be able to express it clearly and concisely.

Gene spent a long time wondering about how to present his ideas. Sometimes he favoured a mind-map. He liked the way this made interconnections visible. He liked making something colourful, attractive. Maybe a hypertext could capture the idea in a web of words? Sometimes he attempted to write¹, to tread a path from this to that. But it was difficult. Whatever he started writing about, it ended up being about everything.

Anyway, enough of this abstract stuff. Gene needed to check on the real, live worms that he kept in his garage. This morning he just had a quick look, to check they weren't all dying or anything. A wormery isn't just a wormery. When you make one, you create a home for fungi and bacteria, nematodes and millipedes, woodlice and ... well, you get the picture.

You don't need to buy a wormery. Just get a plastic crate. Drill drainage holes in the bottom. Eugene made his in a little plug-hole arrangement and then put the box on a few of bricks with the holes over a tub (to collect leachate).

You can buy worms online. They arrive in breathable bags in bit of compost. You can collect them too, when you get used to which ones are which.

Gene got into the habit of looking closely at the earth. When out walking, he scrutinised the dark, young soil along the line that untidily demarcates track and hedge. There's a thin covering of leaves and beneath is fine dark humus. Here, on this track, the world is being remade. The leaves fall and rot. Know that woodlice, millipedes, worms and other detritivores live here on this interface, here where the newly dead morphs into the substrate for new life. Gene bent down to scrape up the leaf-mould: this can go into a wormery. It is teeming with life. Bacteria, fungus, nematodes - perhaps a worm or a woodlouse. You don't even need to look, just dump it in into a bag and scabble about for another couple of handfuls.

1 § 1: *It* is infinite. *It* is real.

§2: *It* (the whole, the superorganism, the bioverse) is God.

§3: One cannot explain what *it* is by means of a neat numbered series of simple propositions.

Worm rescue 101. Worms crawl out onto the road, particularly when it's been raining. They don't want to drown in the saturated soil, but they risk a dry death on the roads as the sun comes out. You can see them sometimes, shrivelled and a darker colour, where they have finally succumbed. That is, I suppose, if they have escaped being picked off by a bird, exposed and naked on the black top. The other possibility is that they are squashed by a car tyre or severed by a horse's hoof. So if you see a worm on the road, pick it up and pop it into the hedgerow. The worms are making soil, refreshing the earth. Take a Buddhist view if you like – every being has been your mother in some previous life. Everything is interconnected. Blake said the cut worm forgives the plough – and part of Gene assented to this. But maybe the squashed worm finds it hard to forgive the automobile. The plough is also cutting and aerating the soil, preparing for growth, life. Darwin called the worms ploughs. The wheel crushes and destroys. Perhaps the worm forgives the bird who at least doesn't waste the animal she eats, but I doubt that the car can be forgiven so easily.

There's a pile of shredded bark and twigs left by some telecom engineers. In this pile Gene found many worms. Nature's nanobots. He came to think of the pile as a "Worm Factory". It must be a great habitat. It must be full of cocoons and baby worms. Gene sifted through carefully with a tub at the ready. One day when he bothered to count, he found seventeen worms. Some were mature (once they have developed the citellum [**check**], they are ready to breed). Some were small, immature. Some were tiny – almost too small to pick up. Gene watered the when it got a bit dry. He sprinkled some chick-mash on – good worm-breeding feed. He tried so hard not to go back and collect again too soon. Every time he went back, there were more worms. Some big ones he's missed altogether, some smaller ones that had grown since his last visit and some tiny red lines, just hatched, barely visible and hard to pick up. Dead freaky. Left alone, the worm population would soar and turn the rotting wood-chip pile into soil. Then the population would shrink again as food became scarce and the habitat became unfavourable. Other stuff likes to live in vermicompost, but it's toxic to worms. Somewhere else the same process begins again. The world remakes itself. Dead freaky.

Gene began to get interested in millipedes after reading the following two words on a wormery website: 'aids composting'. At first, he just added millipedes to the wormery as he found them. Then, on a whim, he peeled back some bark from some old logs at the side of a field. They looked like they had been there for ages. As you might expect, there were lots of woodlice. But then: paydirt! Gene spotted a millipede, a small pale one, curled up – not completely but in a loose spiral. It didn't move, but as he tried to pick it up, it curled tighter

and dropped into the grass. There was no way to find it again.

Gene spent some time researching millipedes on the internet. He turned an old gerbil cage into a vivarium. He put some soil and rotting oak leaves in. Millipedes eat oak leaves to get the chitin they need to make their shells. On a couple of walks he collected some nice-looking moss to lay in the habitat. He put some pieces of bark in and wrapped the wire grill of the lid in cling-film to keep in moisture.

One night he was out with a head-torch and a container, looking through dead leaves by the side of a road. It's not that easy to find millipedes in the dark, but it is more fun. A police-car slowed and the female officer called to Gene:

“Are you okay? Is anything wrong?”

Gene straightened up. His back was a little slow to move as a result of being bent over in the cool evening air for ten minutes or so.

“Yes, thanks. Just collecting millipedes.”

“Oh. Okay. Are you sure you're alright?”

“Yes, thanks. I'm off home now.” Gene didn't want to upset the police officer. He pulled his spine erect and shone the light down into his tub. He'd found one large, black, fine-legged millipede. The beast would be happy in his wormery. The police-car smoothly moved away from the curb as Gene stretched and started walking.

4 Bob

Most of the time I am useless. Some of the time I am superhuman. Still trying to work out if this is a good deal.

Shame it never lasts long enough to let me really achieve anything. Shame fear paralyses my powers.

I can lift heavy objects. I don't need sleep or food. I don't get ill. Thoughts go faster than I can write.

5

Eugene had a new idea. He began to make up some cards with his idea on them and posted them to physics labs. He asked politely that his communication be placed in a file, just as with organ donors. He got some confused but largely positive responses. He was encouraged to think that in the places where scientists worked with particles that travel backwards in

time, his act of self-offering was on record. One lab sent his card back. It was accompanied by a compliments slip saying: "You are crazy." Eugene decided to take it as a compliment

I have to tell you that Eugene gets a bit over-excited like this at times. Then he moves on to something else. Maybe you noticed that with the worms in the garage. He had an on-going interest in fitness. One year he did a marathon, at other times he obsessed about Yoga – you get the picture.

There's a black rabbit living wild in the field adjoining his garden. Eugene watched it eating grass on the lawn.

Why is there is a black bunny here? All the other rabbits are grey – natural rabbit colour. It means something. I'm not looking for a genetic explanation. I want something more holistic.

There's a white rabbit living wild in a field about a mile away from the house. I look for it every time I walk that way. Why is there is a white bunny here?

It's yin and yang. No white bunny without black bunny. Which is which? Is Yin the receptive or the active? Is Yang black or white? I can't remember. Check that later. In a way it doesn't matter. And it's more complex than that. The black dot on the white ground should be another yin / yang. A white bunny and a black bunny curled against each other into a perfect circle. Their eyes another pair of yin / yangs. And so on, infinitely.

That morning, Eugene was getting ready for work. The routine was comforting. He assembled the things he'd need and ate some breakfast. The doorbell rang. Odd.

Gene noted a slightly negative feeling. This wasn't a particularly good day so far. He hadn't slept well. No dreams – and that was always a bad sign; probably he never got into deep enough sleep for dreaming to happen.

Gene kept a dream diary on his bedside table, next to his lavender oil, Bach Rescue Remedy and bottle of Kalms. The book lay open, one page written on, the right one blank. Along the naked spine lay a pen – one of his favourite fibre-nibbed pens. When he was young they were called "Tempo", now there were not many places where you could get them. He didn't understand people's obsession with "gel" pens – these were clearly better and available in three useful colours: black, blue and red. He hadn't written in the book for a few days. Last Saturday he'd dreamed about some kind of operation. He could still remember the knife cutting deeply into his left abdomen (not an appendectomy then, he thought, that's on the right isn't it? Must check that). Despite the op, he'd recorded that this dream had felt positive. Then there was a quite panicky one from Tuesday about an accident. He'd been running and left his shoes somewhere while doing some barefoot running. When he got home he'd realised

that he needed to go and fetch them. Thus far, the dream seemed fairly logical. However, next it turned out that he was drunk (odd, since he rarely drank alcohol) and was planning to drive to the park where he thought the shoes might be. Now the dream became more paranoid. While collecting the shoes he had a bad car accident (this involved the car rolling over completely – in the forwards plane of motion). Somehow he had managed to get home, but then he had to decide whether or not to tell the police what had happened. Painfully, he made the decision to be honest. He was directed to some kind of clinic. A woman apologised and led him through labyrinthine and near-derelict rooms until showing him into a bare room. On waking, he hadn't been able to remember what they talked about in there. Eugene just hoped it was nothing important. Mind you, if it was he was fairly sure his unconscious would try again.

Anyway. Last night he'd woken at 1am and then again at 4am. At 1 am he had got his work bag and put it by the front door. At 4 am he had drunk a cup of decaffeinated tea. So now he felt semi-conscious. Just led through the morning by his habits. The doorbell rang again.

At the door stood a woman. She had shiny, dark-copper hair in a bob. That type of bob which formed a sharp wedge from the upper, fuller part into the neck. This was Gene's favourite kind of haircut. Already he wondered what the nape of her neck looked like. Was her hair naturally that colour? Would there be some hairs growing back already on her richly pale skin, or was the haircut so new that there would be nothing but black dots? She was exactly the same height as Eugene: five feet and eight inches. She wore black. She was a large-built woman and he observed the shape of her breast and the powerful sweep of her thighs. She had blue eyes and her lips were exactly the shape he found most attractive.

“Hello?” Despite the fact that this was clearly the most desirable woman that Eugene had ever seen, he still noticed a slight undertone of irritation in his voice. He tried again.

“Good Morning!”

The woman shifted a bag on her hips. Her backside looked plump and solid, like that of a large, healthy farm animal. Gene licked his lips unconsciously, slowly. She spoke this time.

“Good morning, Mr. Dual. I have a proposition for you. May I come in?”

“Yes, of course.” Her attractiveness had obliterated all feelings of irritation, caution or hesitancy.

Gene led her into the living room and asked her if she'd like a drink.

“I was just having some breakfast,” he explained. “Would you like some tea?”

The woman looked a little confused by this. She hesitated and then said, “Yes, please. That would be fascinating.” This seemed a slightly odd response, to Eugene.

“Right. I only have soya milk – will that be okay? Would you like sugar with it, Ms. ... what should I call you?”

“Soya milk will be great. No sugar thanks. My name is Simone.”

“Okay, Simone. Please, sit down. I'll only be a minute.”

“That's okay, time isn't a problem.”

As he backed out of the room, he watched Simone take the bag off her shoulder with a graceful motion. She straightened the black blouse and Gene admired the fatness of her belly, made obvious as the fabric tightened over her midriff. The woman scanned the room, taking in all the details. Her skin, where it was revealed below the hem of her trousers, was creamy white. She walked over to the large cage which housed Jack and Meg.

“Oh wow, your rats are soo cute!” She shouted through to the kitchen. “What are their names?”

“Jack and Meg,” Eugene replied from near the kettle. “I named them after The White Stripes. They are both girls though, actually.”

Simone moved away from the rats and released herself into the embrace of the sofa.

Eugene boiled water and got out a clean mug. His mind was racing. He could not imagine why this woman should have visited him. He was wondering if he was going to be late for work. He walked back into the room and placed Simone's tea on the floor in front of her. Simone took a sip and then searched in her bag for something – a blister pack of tablets.

“Oh, have you got a headache?”

“No,” Simone gulped the pill down with a mouthful of tea, “I haven't had a drink yet this morning – haven't taken my Lithium.”

This struck Eugene as a rather strange thing to say, but it seemed as if his visitor thought nothing of it, so he let it pass.

“Erm, sorry ... you said something about a proposal – I need to leave for work at 7:20.”

“Oh, the proposition – of course. Time won't be a problem. Maybe you should phone in sick though, for today.”

“Phone in sick? Why?”

“Oh dear. Sorry. I haven't started well, have I?” His visitor looked around and drank some tea. “I am from the future. We got your message, several times. There are some formalities to take care of, but we can leave this Chronicity at ...” She rummaged in her bag again and found a small note book, she opened it and read something. Next she closed her eyes and appeared deep in thought for a moment, the tip of her tongue projected from the right side

of her mouth. She took a deep breath in and exhaled slowly through her nose. "At one-seventy-three pm."

Gene could feel his heart beating wildly. His visitor was from the future!

"Sorry, did you say one-seventy-three? That doesn't make sense."

"No, no. That's right. I should have said one-thirty-seven. Sorry. This is the first time I've done an Extraction. Actually, it's the first time anyone has done an Extraction. Ben9 said I was perfect for the job, I knew I'd mess it up!"

"It's okay." Gene still felt a bit uneasy about phoning work. Part of him wanted to ask for some kind of proof from Simone, but maybe they could get to that later. He rarely took time off. This was interesting enough already. "I am just going to phone in, then. And we can go through the 'formalities'."

"Thanks, Gene. May I call you that?"

Gene nodded as he picked up his phone and dialled his boss.

"Martin? Hi, it's Eugene. I'm not feeling very well today. It's a virus I think. High temperature, headache ... you know. I'll let you know in the morning. Thanks, I will. Thanks."

"Can I have something to eat?"

"Sorry?"

"I'm hungry. Would you mind giving me some food?"

"Right, yes, sorry, of course ... what would you like?"

"Anything ... maybe some toast?"

"Okay. 21st century toast, coming up!"

Simone looked up, slightly startled by Eugene's joke, but then her face relaxed into a smile.

"Can I hold your rats?"

"Yes." Eugene emerged from the kitchen and opened the cage. The rats climbed round to the door and began tentatively sniffing the air. Who's this new person then? Gene put out a hand and Meg put one foot onto it. Her foot felt cold. Something startled her and she drew it back again. Then she relaxed and walked out onto the hand. Gene drew her away from the cage, scooping round with his other hand and placed her onto his shoulder. Jack was now prepared to come out too and he soon followed his sister.

"If you fold up your shirt and make a little pouch, they'll sit there quite happily."

Simone folded up the bottom of her shirt and supported it with her hands as Gene had demonstrated. Gene moved Jack and Meg across to their visitor. He heard toast pop up in the

kitchen.

“You okay with them?”

“I think so.”

When he came back, Simone was standing in the middle of the room. Jack was just poking his pink nose out from the fold in her shirt, while Meg had climbed up onto her shoulder.

“Is that for me?” Simone indicated the toast.

“Yes – I've put some marmalade on. No jam, I'm afraid.”

Simone ate toast.

“Think I'll have some too. You okay with them?” Eugene was actually quite nervous about anyone else handling his rats. In fact – he realised – no one ever had touched them other than the breeder he'd bought them from.

“Yeah – no problem.”

They ate toast. Gene offered Meg a bit of crust and Simone let Jack take a piece out of her fingers.

“Okay, I think I should put them back now. We need to get on with stuff. Can I go online?”

Eugen moved over to Simone and scooped up his rats. As he did so, he nodded towards his computer desk.

“Yes. Just turn on the machine – the big round button on the base unit. It's Linux, is that okay?”

“That's wonderful!”

Rats rehoused, Eugene walked through to the kitchen to wash up. Simone seated herself at his linux-box. She once again found the small notebook in her bag and placed it beside the keyboard. As the machine booted, she leafed through, finding the correct page.

“Mr Dual, it's not working.

“Just a minute, coming!” Eugene came through into the living room, a folded tea-towel over his left shoulder. “What's up?” He watched the computer screen as it showed some cryptic messages about the boot sequence.

“I need to get online. It's not working.” Slight petulance in her tone.

“It's booting up. Just takes a minute.”

“Of course, sorry – I've read about that somewhere. Just forgot it.

“That's great. I'm going to need your credit card. I need to buy a domain name. Is that

okay?"

"Sure." Gene began to get a bit uneasy at this point. After all, how did he know his beautiful breakfast-guest was from the future. He'd already lied to his boss and ruined his sickness record on her say-so. She did seem to be a bit odd. But what if she was just a bit odd, not from the future at all. He wanted it to be true, so badly. At this point, he said nothing. He fished his card-wallet from his back pocket and handed it over.

"Do I need to do anything?"

"Hmm? Oh, yes." Again, Simone looked deep in thought and confused in a sexy way. "Think of it like emigration. Put your house in order. Arrange your affairs. That sort of thing."

"That might take time. Aren't we leaving at 1:37?"

"1:37? Oh, yes. No, it's fine. Put everything you want to have with you in a pile – or boxes if you have them – in one of the rooms. That's one of the things I am arranging now – I can instruct Ben9 to have them collected later."

"Who is Benign?"

"Good question!" She laughed. "He's my boss. I can't tell you much, before we leave. It might cause Perturbations."

"What do you mean? How do I even know you are really from the future?"

"Sorry, Eugene. Oh dear. Er ... can you just trust me for now?"

"Well, I have so far. I mean, I have just given you my credit card."

"Yes. Oh – I'm going to need a few additional security details."

"How much is this costing?"

"It doesn't matter – you won't be here to pay it."

"You would say that, though, wouldn't you?"

"I am only buying a domain name and a little hosting space. It's going to be ... £275.73. Okay?"

"This is confusing."

"I know. Just pile up stuff you want collecting."

"Collecting when?"

"Later. Just later, okay? Okay. I might have something that will help. I was hoping we wouldn't have to do this." Simone looked in her bag and found a small, opaque, red, plastic wallet. She opened it and drew out a home-made book, hand-stitched with string.

"Where did you get this?" It was, unmistakably, the book he'd seen the girl writing in on the train yesterday.

“It was found. We tried to track down some of the things you mentioned in your journals – for verification purposes.”

“You've read my journals?”

“No, not personally. They are highly confidential. But I have been briefed. A bit.”

“You realise this doesn't prove anything? You might just have got this book from ...”
Gene looked inside the front cover and read where the child had written: 'this book belong to ...'. “Annette, like last night.”

“Yes, I might. Or Ben9 might have spend huge amounts of time and resources tracing items of significance with which to convince you. Look, just go with it for now, please. Have you got any other companion animals?”

“Comp ... you mean pets? Yes. Well, sort of. As well as Jack and Meg, I have some worms in the garage.”

“Okay. You need to make arrangements for them. And get some of your stuff sorted. The basics – clothes, books.”

“Arrangements?”

“You can bring your rats, if you can carry them.”

6 Bob

Everything that's wrong with me is part of this disease.
Everything that's right with me is part of this disease.
Everything that's good in me is part of this disease.
Everything that's bad in me is part of this disease.

Sometimes I feel as if I am observing it.
Is there any me separate from this disease?
No. There's nothing in there. Just a void
clothing itself with these things it is not.

Is it just yin/yang?
Decay mocks the new growth;
The beautiful unharmable beast
screams the darkness isn't real.

The whole thing is mad, Gene thought. He went out to the garage and took the lid off his original wormery. Wormery #1, he called it. He lifted the hessian and a couple of nice fatties pulled back out of the light. With grave misgivings, he lifted the box and took it out into the garden. The best thing, he decided, would be to set them free. He tipped the box out onto some soil underneath a shrub he'd never bothered to identify and watched as the worms fled the light. Wormery #2 was outside and got the same treatment.

Next he enticed the rats out with some sweet talk and dog biscuits. He man-handled them into the pet-carrier and put in some food in a small dish. In the kitchen, Eugene placed the rats carefully on the table and placed a bowl of water in the carrier. They'd almost certainly knock it over and walk in it, but it still seemed the right thing to do.

He moved swiftly through the main room, realising that he was now getting quite excited about the whole thing. He didn't speak to Simone this time – she looked busy. In his bedroom he gathered all of his favourite clothes and put them in his large rucksack. Books – that was going to be the problem. He scuttled up into the loft, where there were some cardboard boxes. He dropped them carefully through the hole. Luckily, his books were well organised. The really crucial ones were in the bedroom. He filled boxes swiftly. Spiritual life, science fiction novels, self-help, ecology. That covered it pretty well, he felt. He got down on hands and knees and collected his filled notebooks. Was he supposed to bring them, he wondered? Better check with Simone.

Gene took the boxes downstairs and placed them in the centre of his living space, as he'd been told. While he performed this task, he threw a few comments her way.

“I've set the worms free.”

“Ace!”

He placed the second box next to the first.

“The rats are ready to go!”

“Well done.”

The last box was a real bad boy and he placed this across the first two.

“Should I bring my notebooks?”

“NO! You have to leave them under your bed.”

“How do you know ... ? Okay, never mind.”

“Is it okay to bring some stuff on a memory-stick?”

“Yes, of course. Our technical people can recover stuff from them, no prob. I'm almost finished. Okay ... done.”

Gene sat himself at his keyboard and plugged in his memory-stick. He just copied across everything in his Documents folder. Simone was picking up books from the top layer of the top box and studying blurbs. A progress dialogue told him that this was going to take 7 minutes, then it changed its mind and said it would be 15mins and 34secs. Whatever. Simone hitched up her black combat trousers. She picked up his ruck-sack by the top loop, as if checking the weight.

“Got everything, do you think?”

“Yes. I think so. So, what now?”

“We need to sort out a few more formalities. I could do with a break though. Can I use your loo?”

“Yeah – top of the stairs and straight on.”

“Thanks, Gene.”

He couldn't sit still and watch the files copy across. He got up and walked around the mound of belongings. Three boxes and a rucksack. He picked up his work-bag and began going through that, discarding a few things he wouldn't need. Merge and purge. Not going to need the work-file, he thought. Diary? No – nothing in there that he could imagine needing in the future. He placed the things he was discarding onto the top of a small book-shelf. He checked his lunch and put that safely in there. He hated to go anywhere without some food with him.

He listened to the unfamiliar sound of someone else walking down his staircase and looked up as Simone re-entered the living room.

“Can we go for a walk? I need a shop – is there a Post Office nearby?”

“Yes – no problem.”

Eugene and the emissary stepped out of the front door of the terraced house and turned left.

“The Post Office is down here. It's inside that Off-License.”

“Great!”

As they walked, Gene began to think again. It just seemed slightly wrong. Not what he was expecting.

“Everything okay? You've gone a bit quiet.”

“Yeah – it's weird though.”

“Yes. It is.”

“This isn't how I imagined it would be.”

“Were you expecting shiny robots and a big spaceship?” Simone snorted.

“No ... maybe. I suppose I didn't think it was possible. At some level.”

“Well it is – just about. It's difficult. It's resource-heavy and very secret. If the Chronologists get hold of this we'll have some major problems. At least we've got the Meta-ethics a bit more sorted out.”

“What?”

“Well, there's a large group – a majority really – who are not happy about the use of Chronicity-altering techniques. They say that the results are untested. The Perturbations are totally unpredictable, it's true.”

“But it's safe?”

Simone coughed a laugh, “Not really. I mean we've never got anyone back before.”

“Oh.”

“You volunteered, remember?”

“Yes, oh it's fine. I just thought ...”

“It's the future, it's not perfect. Don't worry though. 'The whole is not in hazard.' Are you sure you are alright?”

“Uh huh. Yep. In here.”

Eugene led Simone into the Bargain Booze outlet. She began scanning the shelves.

“We need to buy a will, one of those do it yourself things.”

Gene moved towards the back of the shop – where the post-office was. A grille was still separating this area from the rest of the shop. Not open yet. What time was it? 8:39. A lot seemed to have happened since 7am.

“Not open yet.” Simone looked confused. Gene explained further: “The post-office isn't open yet. We can't get the will until nine. Is there anything else? Do you need anything else?”

“Well, I'd like a look around town.”

“Sure.”

“Oh, and I would like to buy some cigarettes.”

“Do you smoke?” Eugene looked shocked.

“No, they went out of fashion a long time ago.”

“Did they get banned?”

“Er, no. Anyway, will you get me some? I'm curious. I've read that we used to self-medicate with nicotine, back then. Now, I mean. I'd like to try.”

“You won't like it. It's horrible at first, until you get used to it.”

Simone suddenly looked annoyed. Her big face crumpled into one of those frowns again.

“Can you get me some, though?”

“Okay. If you want me to.”

Gene walked back to the Offie counter and asked for a pack of cigarettes. He bought one of the strong brands, it didn't seem worth doing this by halves.

“And a box of matches, please.”

As she walked out of the shop, he handed the red and white box to Simone. She fumbled with the cellophane and opened the carton. Gingerly, she teased one of the cigarettes out, holding the filter between the nails of her thumb and third finger. She placed it in her mouth and Eugene lit it for her. The perfect gentleman!

Simone inhaled through the thing. She expended a huge effort in containing the coughing fit that Eugene was expecting.

“Thanks,” the word was barked out amidst a swirl of smoke. Simone held her hand out for the matches and put them, with the cigarettes, into her bag. Her hair shone deep copper in the weak sunlight. They crossed the road and walked down the pedestrianised area of Gene's town. Simone looked in shop windows and continued to smoke her cigarette like a total novice.

Gene wondered what it was like for her. Which aspects of this totally-ordinary scene seemed totally alien to her? Small delivery lorries were still parked outside some of the shops. People were opening up and getting ready for the day's trading. There was an older man with a dog, heading back from the newsagent with his paper. A woman in a suit getting cash out from the ATM outside Nationwide. The sweet-shop lady was putting out her triangular sign: “Traditional Boiled Sweets.”

Gene's guest was enjoying the experience. She smoked her cigarette and looked interestedly at the products displayed in the window of Boots.

“Will it be open now?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, let's get back ... wait – can we get a coffee?” They were stood outside Costa. Eugene had thought it would never last, but it did seem to do a good trade. In fact he'd been in a few times to ask if he could have some of their used coffee grounds – for the worms.

“Well, I have called in sick. I mean, what if someone sees me? I am supposedly ill with a virus.”

“Don't worry. You're leaving for ever, remember? Come on. I'll pay.”

“It's not the money. Okay. Okay. Have you actually got some money, then?” By now he

was following her through the door. He looked in wonder at her back. There were gorgeous small rolls of fat moving in arcs from the centre of her shoulders down and round to her sides. Gene studied them intensely. One was directly below where her bra-strap must lie, but two others formed themselves below, curving round and into her solid waist.

“Yes ... somewhere.” Again she rooted through her bag and found some £20 notes. Peering a little she checked the dates.

“It's twenty-oh-nine, isn't it?”

“If you mean two thousand and nine, then yes.”

“I could get us into all sorts of trouble if I gave him this one. It's a twenty-eleven!” Simone waved the note briefly and placed it back in amongst the others. “I'll play safe and use this one, it's from twenty-oh-eight.” She turned the mainly-purple note over in her hand. “And in remarkably good condition.”

The Barista, whose badge identified him as 'Robert', turned to Simone and asked:

“What can I get you?”

“I'll have a large hot chocolate.” She turned to Gene, “Do you want something?”

“Yes please. I'll have a soya latte.”

“And a large soya latte, please. Thanks, ahm, Robert.”

They sat at a small table.

“Why me?”

“You volunteered.”

“Yeah, but lots of people must have thought the same thing, done something similar.”

“Actually, no. And it's dangerous.”

“Yeah, you said. And expensive and secret.”

“Well, you do happen to be an excellent subject for the first trial. According to Ben9, your extraction will cause minimal Perturbation.”

“Meaning?”

“It won't mess things up much if we take you out of this Chronicity.”

“Oh.” Gene wondered if he should be pleased or insulted. His life was so unimportant, its ramifications so limited that he could be excised from the time-flow without making so much as a ripple. “So my life is meaningless.”

“I didn't say that. Let's just say you were destined to come forward.”

“Destined?”

“Whatever. Don't worry about it.”

Coffees drunk, they headed back to the Post Office. Simone looked through the racks of bubble-wrap, Post-paks and Scotch tape.

“Here, this is the thing. You need to write a will. The main thing is to keep that website hosting going for a few years. And lets get some booze.”

“You have to get the booze in the other bit – the Off Licence.”

“I know. Okay, do you want to get this? I'll meet you over there.” Simone seemed more confident with the shopping now. Gene queued up and paid for the write-your-own-will kit. He weaved between the ice-cream freezer, beer-coolers and racks of biscuits and loo-roll until he met up with Simone near the door of the shop. She was holding a large bottle of vodka and a medium-sized bottle of Cola.

“Got what you need? Is vodka out of fashion in the future too?”

“Uh? No, I mean yes, but it's not that – this will help with the Extraction.” It was hard to argue with that.

Back in the house, Gene checked on the rats. They were asleep. I don't suppose they would really care even if they knew that they were about to travel in time, Gene thought.

Simone followed him into the kitchen. She was lighting up another cigarette.

“Have you got that will handy?”

“Yeah.” Gene sat down at his kitchen table and opened up the pack. It looked complicated.

“Right you don't need to worry about most of this. Just leave some funds to cover the hosting until, let's say ... twenty-fifteen. Do you want me to write that bit?”

“Thanks. Yes.”

“Got a pen?”

Simone wrote in a laborious, curvy style of handwriting. Gene watched as she instructed his executor to put aside the bulk of his savings to ensure that the new website she'd created would stay online until 2150.

“I thought you said twenty-fifteen?”

“Did I? Sorry, I meant twenty-one-fifty.”

“How far forward have you come from?”

“Let's not get into that, yet. Okay. The less I tell you now, the easier the whole thing is.”

Simone sucked the fibre-tipped pen (not called Tempo anymore) contemplatively.

“Right. You are going to have some money from the sale of your house and so on. What

do you want to do with that.”

“I was always planning to leave it to charity.”

“Yeah? Okay. Which one? D'you want me to keep doing the writing?”

“Thanks, yes.” Simone was far more effective after a couple of cigarettes, Gene noted, although her numeracy skills were still a bit haphazard. Her lips were full and un-made-up. She smiled a twinkly smile.

“Do you already know which charity I am going to choose?”

“Sort of.”

“Why don't you just write it then?”

“It's better if you tell me.”

“How is it? Better.”

“Oh, I don't know. Just tell me which one you want.”

“Okay then: make it The Dog's Trust.”

“Great. Now, shall we have some vodka?”

“Okay.”

Eugene found a couple of tumblers and put them on the table.

“I'll sort these out. Shall we have some music?”

Eugene went into the living room and turned on his amplifier and CD player. There was already a disc in the machine: “De-loused in the Comatorium”. He couldn't think of anything else he'd rather listen to so, as soon as the amp had clicked to indicate that it had powered up, he pressed play and adjusted the volume control.

Simone came into the room with the drinks.

Later, quite drunk and swerving, Simone guided Gene to the Extraction Point. Once again, they were walking through town. Gene tried to work out if he felt weird because he'd pulled a sicky and was prowling through town drunk as a lord or because he'd packed his life up and piled it in the middle of a room while he set off with a woman who claimed to be able to take him to the future. She was right. He was totally mad. He laughed, there was an edge of mania in there and it felt like a guilty pleasure.

“Shall we get a magazine? We might be hanging around a bit.”

“Okay.” Gene was enjoying going along with Simone's whims. He took her into WHSmiths. He stood, trying to look inconspicuous with his pet-carrier full of rats while she scanned the racks. After a few minutes Simone selected Cosmopolitan and turned on the ball

of her foot in order to find her way to the checkout. She'd overdone the turn and ended up facing the best-sellers instead. She unwound a little and approached the till.

"You getting anything?"

"No. I've got a book in my bag."

"Yes, of course you have." Simone beamed at the woman at the counter who scanned the magazine.

"Would you like to buy some half-priced chocolate?"

"Oh yes, please." Simone replied to the woman, whose name-badge said her name was Briony. "Thank you, Briony. I'll take some Dairy Milk and can I have a carrier bag please."

Now Simone seemed to know where to go. She took the lead and strode up past Ethel Austin's and the Army and Navy shop. She kept walking until she got to the War Memorial, and there she stopped.

"Right. We just need to be here at one-thirty-seven and in physical contact."

She navigated round to a bench and sat down, patting the wood beside her. Gene went and sat next to her, placing the rats beside him and his rucksack on the ground between his knees. He put his left hand protectively on top of the rat-carrier.

"I make it half-past."

"Good. We'd better get into contact now, just to be ready." Simone put her left hand, palm-up, on Gene's thigh. Gene held her hand. It was mainly warm, although the tips of her little-finger felt a little cold and he wondered if she had some circulation problems. It felt absolutely wonderful to be doing this. When was the last time he had sat, drunk, in broad daylight holding the hand of a woman? Never, come to think of it.

"What's going to happen?"

"Not sure. The idea is that we are put into some kind of holding thing, while Ben9 runs some algorithms."

"The idea."

"We haven't done this before, remember?"

"I thought you said people had come back before?"

"Yes, but they weren't able to return. We never managed that part of it."

"So why will it work this time?"

Simone opened her bag and pulled out a cigarette. Without moving her hand from his, she placed it between her lips and went back in for matches.

"Better not let go, could be any minute now." She pushed the match box open one-

handed and took out a match. Next she passed the box to Gene. He saw what she was planning and held the striking surface towards her. She swept the match across the array of brown spots and drew the flaming head towards her lips. Having lit the cigarette, Simone took a deep pull and spoke through the smoke. Gene inhaled her words along with the nicotine and other toxins. He thought about tocsin – some kind of musical word. Not sure what it means, must check it later. Toxic tocsin. He listened to the music of her poisoned breath as the cloud disintegrated revealing her pale blue eyes.

“I don't know. What time is it now?”

Gene rotated his right wrist (for some reason, he'd always worn a watch on his right arm) enough to see the face of his Casio watch, aware that in doing so he was bending her hand back. “One thirty - ”

Gene blanked out for a moment. If anyone had been watching, they might have wondered where the couple who were sitting on that bench a moment ago had gone. But probably no-one was watching. And anyway, you tend not to notice that kind of stuff. Or if you do, you just rationalise it. They must have moved. Or maybe it was actually yesterday that I saw them there. Now, what did I need in town? Oh yes, a shotgun (or whatever).

“ - seven. Woah, what just happened?”

“Oh my word, that freaks me out!” Simone frowned and shut her eyes tight. Opened them again. Sorry.”

The two found themselves still sitting. But now (if that's the word) they were on a couple of vinyl-covered in what looked like a hospital waiting-room. It was a small room without windows. On the floor were some duplo blocks and a fire-engine. There was a door to Simone's right. Opposite them were two other chairs, one with a triangular tear in the cover. Between the facing rows of chairs and opposite the door of this tiny room was a grey-topped low table with nothing on it.

“Waiting room. Well, it's not really a room. It's like a node or something. We should keep holding hands.”

Gene pressed his legs together and felt the bulk of his rucksack – his books had made it also. His left hand was still resting on his rats' cage. He looked down and saw that Meg was awake. She gave an indignant squeak and sniffed through the air-vents in the carrier roof. And then he lost consciousness again.

8

I am anti-genius. Bipolar martyr.
If I climb out someone else sinks.
A black hole in a lab, held tight inside a magnetic cage.

When I'm up I'm better than you: indestructible, prettier too.
When I'm down ... best you don't come around.

Better thank God that you're not like me.
Everyday I thank Her I'm not like you.

How it feels to hear feathers creak as a goose flies overhead.
The way the green of growth catches in my throat -
There things are on the list of symptoms.

The way I feel meditating in a room with others.
The gentle pressure that turns my head towards
A light that shines (from a high dark corner).

Or when I am alone: the sense of a presence,
A shining figure - the angelic torch. Sometimes a word.
All of these are in the DSM-IV.
The diagnostic criteria include singing.

9

Gene opened his eyes and almost fell off his chair. Now he was sitting at his computer, back at his house. Without thinking, he moused onto the icon that ran the program that checked his mail. There was a message from Ben9. Oh, he thought. I thought she called him Benign.

From: ben9@ben9.net

Subject: perturbations

Dear Mr. Dual,

Many thanks for your willingness to participate in this experiment. I have reprimanded your guide: she did not adhere closely to the mission-focus. This, however, does not seem to have had any bearing on the adverse Perturbations the algorithm picked up while you were in holding.

We have found in previous trials that the process can interfere with the on-

task-focus and ethical judgements. Simone was successful in creating the rapport that our research suggests is crucial to the Extraction process. If, however, you wish us to identify a replacement, please reply to this message using only the phrase: "Communication from E. Dual" in your subject line.

Be advised we have not aborted the mission!

Gene got up. Best get some lunch, he thought. Then he realised he had no idea what time it was, or even what day. He sat back down, launched Opera and navigated to the BBC news pages.

The BBC told him it was 2 pm. Eugene remembered the vodka that he'd drunk. He did need to eat. After lunch he put Jack and Meg back into their big cage and went to bed. He was exhausted. Maybe this is like jet-lag, he thought.

10 In which Bob slips into a church to pray

Come into the chapel, come into the circle. The chairs are arranged around a simple table. At the back of the room, a wooden Christ dangles on a cross that grows out of a menorah. I observe the bend in his legs, the carved lines of his belly. It's a simple room. Some old stained glass survives in the rear wall, but everything else is modern and minimal. I settle myself and close my eyes. I keep my feet flat on the floor and feel the connection to the earth. I take a deeper breath and let it go, releasing into this moment. I bring my spine into relaxed alert uprightness, I don't need the support of the chair back. Now I allow my eyes to soften and I am ready to start. The room is empty and silent. It's just me and the man on the cross.

The breath is my reliable guide and I count for a while. But I am thinking about Mary and her perfect obedience. She's the mirror-image of her son. He allowed his body to be ravaged on the cross, she gave herself up to the Spirit to bear a child. Be it with me according to your word. Think about what that obedience meant an unmarried woman in that time. And then there's the fact that her cousin was the mother of John. Something almost unfair there – that the Spirit should choose two women so closely related.

And then I picture Mary at the foot of the cross. I am her and the wooden man hanging tortured is my son. I try to feel my way. If I was the mother and it was my son on the cross. If I knew him to be without sin. But of course that is easy, for a father, the child always seems perfect, adorable. Her surrender. Nothing she could do. She could not move away and she could not bear to watch as they killed her perfect child.

And now I am thinking about the early stories. How Mary watched him grow. And when he stayed behind in Jerusalem and they found him in the temple it says: Mary treasured these things in her heart. I find that so beautiful. And I am there with Mary in that moment, feeling the sweet tearing inside which is one kind of love. Tears come. It's good. It's okay.

I am still breathing in and out. And some others are coming in. I keep my eyes closed and relaxed as they settle around me. And almost immediately I start to feel the energy in my chest. Because now I am not alone. I remember His words: When two or three of you are gathered in my name. And whatever you believe, there's an undeniable power in the shared silence as we all sit and wait and adore.

Adore. I let some phrases work down into my quiet. The Lamb has been slain since the beginning. Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Ecce agnus dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi. Take me, I'm yours. Let it be unto me according to your word. Nothing matters. Take me. I can't slow down or settle on one way in.

I want to pray like Weil: to remove myself and my desires. But today there's so much going on. I try to give myself up to silence and waiting; I work through the Lord's Prayer. I find myself staying with: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Weil wrote that it is about letting go of the past, not expecting any kind of recompense. "Give us this day our daily bread". And by this He meant spiritual nourishment. So I feed on the silence, on the atmosphere in this room. The pressure of the other beings upon me, the impulse of all those who have adored here before.

Take me, I'm yours. Your will be done. Nothing matters. Lamb of God. Trying not to try too hard – yearning to remove myself. Wiping away. It's like washing up. The grease of my selfhood adheres to the glass bowl from which I eat. Like porridge it's sticky and gelatinous. The water and the cloth take the particles away until there are areas of clearness. I'm seeing my bowl.

The glass bowl has a pale blue band around the rim. It is scratched from the spoons, knives and forks that have scraped against it. I love its simplicity. Its perfect meal-sized dimensions. It's suitability. And this is how I want to be. Simple, useful, transparent. Scratched and damaged, I can serve.

11 Eugene

That night, Eugene dreamed about time-travel. In the dream he was using the technology to try to avert some personal disaster. It had to do with a child he was looking after. In the first version the boy was killed in an accident. This bit was hazy. The story he wanted to erase, the time-strand he needed to escape: already becoming unreadable. Maybe a car ran the boy over, perhaps ... no, it's gone. I don't even want to think about it. The main character retreated into his garage-laboratory and experimented. He produced a device that would take him back to a point just before "the event". It was activated by a small hand-held device. The thing was chunky and had a hinged portion. You opened it up to reveal a button. If you pressed the button, you jumped back. It was important to keep the thing closed, so as not to set it off by mistake.

He pressed it and was lying in bed. He could tell that the tragic event had not occurred because his heart was not heavy in his chest.

In this first iteration, the boy slipped in the bathroom and fractured his head on the

unforgiving tiles. He died of a brain haemorrhage. He pressed the button.

Again he awoke in a perfect world. The man got ready for work and the boy put on his school uniform. There was a Beatles song on the radio and he began to speak about them. He felt his heart open as he told the child the familiar story. But the thing was tinged with sadness and he found himself trying to explain “the tragic event”, the assassination of John Lennon.

They stepped out of the house into a gun-fight. (Don't take a knife to a gun fight. Don't take your treasure to a fire-fight.) The police yelled: “Stop, police.” The person pursued turned and fired. The fire-arms officer fired. It doesn't really matter whose bullet stuck his child, does it?

Open the box, press the button. Joy, despair. Press the button. Contentment, misery. Press it. A good start, tragedy. Press it. Press.

You are dreaming Eugene. This isn't real. You don't have a child. Time-travel isn't like that. Time travel is sitting holding her hand, drunk, next to a war-memorial then waiting in a node while the Ben9 checks the logarithms for turbulence. If you anti-log the sum of $\log x$ and $\log y$ you get the product of the two numbers.

Eugene tried to get as much of this down in his dream journal as possible. Then he got washed and dressed.

12 Bob

Listen to music. Eat food. Have a warm bath. Cut. Masturbate. Fast until the body fizzes. Take ephedrine, take codeine. Get drunk. Lift weights. Run. Look at plants. Hedges that were showing buds a few days ago now have fresh-opened leaves. Dark side. Desire to escape. Lust. Suicide. Hopeless mess. Bonhoeffer says one should give up all attempt to make something of oneself. I am making a good job of that, although of course I haven't given it up and secretly I want to be a mystic, a saint. Secrets. My real life is iceberg-secret, under the radar. I would like to hide and be invisible. If no-one knew me I could erase myself. Power off.

13

Simone rang the bell at ten past seven. She looked different. Her hair was different. A glossy blue-black. It was longer also, reaching down towards her shoulders. She was wearing a vest top with these quite thin straps. Gene stood at the door for a moment, looking at the way the cotton pressed gently into her exuberant freckled shoulders and how the golden skin was

brushed lightly by her hair.

“Howdy, Eugene.” Simone had a conspiratorial smile on her face. And this was appropriate, since they were conspirators – planning to smuggle him, Eugene Dual, out of this time altogether. “Thanks for not asking for a new Extractor. I love coming here!”

“Would you like some breakfast?”

“Oh yes please.”

Gene went back to the kitchen to make toast and tea. He had been infected by the air of secrecy and excitement that seemed to possess Simone this morning. At any moment he expected strangely-uniformed operatives to burst in and arrest them. He laughed as he watched water boil and turned the toast in order to ensure even browning.

When Bob came back and place the plate and mug in front of his beautiful visitor, her first action was to find a tablet and wash it down with a sip of tea. Since the tea was hot, this sip was pulled from the surface by suction in a noisy slurp. Gene watched her mouth as she drank.

“Lithium?”

“Yeah.”

“Why do you take it?”

“Oh – you know – manic/depressive.”

“Oh, yes. I thought people called it bipolar these days.”

“We prefer the old name. We reclaimed it years ago. It's empowering – and more accurate.”

“Everyone's bipolar in the future?”

“Everyone's Manic/Depressive.”

“Why?”

“No-one knows, really. Everyone else died of 'The Horror'.”

“Everyone else died of horror?”

“No, 'The Horror'. It was like a plague. The eco-psychologists say it was good: it dramatically reduced the human population. It was very ... er ... balancing – for the planet.”

“But I'm not bipolar.”

Simone snorted: “Yeah, you are. You keep it together pretty well, but you're perfectly insane. It's wonderful. Come on, you must know.”

“Not really.”

“Well, whatever. Just ride the wave. No crest without a trough, right?”

There was less to do this times. They ate breakfast.

Eugene remembered the money that Simone had been looking through in the cafe. Part of him still wanted proof. Something strange was going on, but he wasn't sure – still couldn't quite accept it. Yes, he was going on with it, but with a rather ironic attitude. Actually, he realised, he was mainly just enjoying spending time with Simone. Like now, in his back yard. She was sitting in one of his white plastic garden chairs while he refilled his bird-feeders.

“Simone?”

“Yes, Eugene!”

“Have you got any more of that money? You know from the future?”

“Yes, loads! Why?”

“Can I have a look? I mean, I know it doesn't really prove anything, but let's just say it might help me to believe.”

“No problem.” Simone got her purse out and opened up the bit designed to hold coins. “Here's a dollar from twenty-forty. Don't know why I've got this with me – we're not going to the USA, are we?”

Simone flipped the coin in the air. It span as it moved in a perfect trajectory from where she was sitting to where Eugene stood. He held his hand out and the coin dropped onto his palm. Eugene studied the coin. He didn't know what dollar coins were supposed to look like. They were probably pretty easy to forge anyway, compared to the banknotes he'd seen Simone with. However, he found he did fully believe now. He felt it physically, this new certainty, his absolute faith in Simone. It reminded him of how he felt sometimes when listening to music. A song could affect him physically. He felt the music running down the side of his body. This was nothing to do with how loud it was, it happened when he was using headphones. For some reason he felt that it was the fat parts of his body that resonated most with the music that really moved him. He enjoyed this feeling.

Gene looked at the coin again. The angry-looking eagle. Around the rim of the coin he could read a date: 4020.

“Hey, did you say forty-twenty or twenty-forty?”

“Twenty-forty?”

“Well this coin ...”

“No – it can't be from forty-twenty. That's not good. Pass it back, Gene.”

“Okay.” Gene tried to flip the coin the way Simone had. But he bodged it and instead of describing a scintillating arc of silver, the dollar crashed to the ground. Gene and his guest

watched. Something strange was happening.

The yard was partly covered in flagstones, partly in one of those tessellations of brick. Weeds pushed up between the bricks during the summer and moss grew in some of the cracks. Gene used to go round pulling up weeds and scraping out moss. He probably only did it once a year – just to keep the place looking reasonable. But in the places between the bricks where weeds had grown and been pulled out, there were little gaps.

The coin lay near to one of these gaps. As they watched, a large but otherwise ordinary-looking beetle popped up out of the crack. As if it knew what it was doing, it moved directly to the coin and grabbed it with its jaws. Gene knew ants were supposed to be able to lift some ridiculously heavy things (well, relative to their own weight of course). He couldn't remember if he'd ever read a similar thing about beetles. Have to check that. This beetle did not attempt a full lift. Instead, he tilted the coin up and dragged it backwards. Beetle and dollar disappeared into the crack. The two humans were stunned.

“What just happened?”

“Oh shit! That can't be good. What date did you say?”

“Forty-twenty. I mean – I can't believe I just held an artefact from two thousand years in my future. But somehow the fact that a clearly-sentient beetle just stole it just killed it for me.”

“That doesn't make sense. I've never been to forty-twenty. It would be totally illegal anyway.”

“Are you saying that forty-twenty is the future for you, too? What year did you set off from.”

Simone had already tuned out from the conversation. She was thinking, trying to make some sense of what had just happened. “I can't tell you that. Perturbations.”

“I think we just saw a pretty major one.”

Dream [not sure where to fit it in]

In the dream, somehow he could tell it was, Gene was in a garden. Maybe that was it – he didn't have a garden. This was like the garden in the house where he had grown up. A long garden, the part nearest the house was lawn, but then a trellis created a boundary. Beyond was a big vegetable patch and, at the very back of the garden, some fruit trees and a greenhouse.

He was holding a memory-stick. Without conscious thought, he threw the stick up in a steep parabola. As it approached the grass, a hole opened up. A very large millipede (perhaps an African one, although Gaia knows how it had got here) came up through the hole and took the memory stick. Gene felt that this had triggered something. As if the insects had been waiting for the information on the drive for a long time. He thrilled to the sense of huge, irreversible change.

Down with the Empire. Up with the Spring. Hastening the downfall, hearkening the dawn.

From the vegetable garden behind him, he could hear a noise. He walked back towards the trellis and could see that the neat rows had changed. He'd dug this soil over with his father many times, riddling out stones and preparing it for growing potatoes. But now the soil was moving, looking like sand dunes or the waves themselves. Gene stood still. Out of the earth came huge earthworms. They slid past him, nuzzling into his hands with heads. Their blind heads were the size of a labrador's and their mouths were gentle, more like an elephant's trunk than a mouth. Their bodies were amazingly strong. Gene could see the five hearts and the huge veins. The worms were speaking to him telepathically.

“Thank you. We know you protected our ancestors. Every worm you moved from tarmac to soil salutes you.”

The worms dove back into the soil.

Eugene

“Any other questions, Mr Dual?”

“Well there is something ...”

“Ask away! We owe you so much for volunteering.”

“Can I have a dog?”