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**Robert Markland Smith**

**Markland's Colouring Book**

**2016**

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**MARKLAND'S  
COLOURING BOOK**

**Robert Markland Smith**

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**Dedicated to**  
**BONNIE, ISABELLE AND CORDELIA**

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## The Egyptian Tree of Life



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Calgary Stampede

THE  
SPIRITUAL  
LIFE



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# WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL

*“And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the  
breaking of the day.”*

(Genesis 32:24)

## PART ONE

### THE ANGEL AT THE GATE OF THE GARDEN

The sun is rising at the bottom of the hill; beyond the railroad tracks, beyond Preston Street and the Italian neighbourhood. It is a hazy, cloudy morning, with long streaks of gray lying down languorously, stretching lazily over the dim dirty yellow ball of light, and I am in a fog, mainly because I am four years old and just woke

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up. A light is going on in my mind, and I tell myself I am going to remember this dawn.

I live on Hickory Street, with my sister and my folks. Obviously. In 1952, no one gets divorced; it is difficult. My sister? Claire is three years older than me, and I often hang out with her girlfriends.

There is Sally Clark, who one day tells my mom, "I don't wike Wobert, he is too wough!" I defend the little girls in the neighbourhood against the mean dog, Spanky, who likes to terrorize little kids. I beat him with a stick once. Spanky runs between the legs of the little girls to scare them, so I show him. Sally has curly hair and wears thick glasses. My sister also wears glasses, that she sometimes leaves in the middle of the street, on the pavement.

Then my mom comes to pick up and save the glasses. Sometimes boys from the Italian neighbourhood come up the hill to Hickory Street, carrying knives, to do whatever mischief they can. And there I am, fighting with them on the street, until my mother comes out

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of the house and breaks it up. These are boys around eight years old. At this point, I think I can keep the evil out of the community.

In 1952, there are not many cars on Hickory Street: the bread man comes by once a day, with his horsedrawn wagon, selling packaged bread from door to door to the housewives. There is horse manure strewn here and there along the sidewalks. Then there is the milkman, who also has a horsedrawn wagon, and the ice man, who sells blocks of cold, transparent ice to the housewives, who use the ice in their iceboxes. There are no refrigerators yet. And finally, there is the rag man, who comes every now and then also with his horsedrawn wagon, yelling, "Rags and bottles! Rags and bottles!"

There are no supermarkets in 1952; there is Skipper's, a grocery and magazine store down the street, on Carling Avenue, where there is traffic. Sometimes tanks roll down Carling. I am not allowed to go to Skipper's, because he sells porno magazines, sado-masochistic material with pictures of semi-naked women being tortured by soldiers, on the cover. And Skipper, the owner, is a nice man; he is

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always friendly with me. He doesn't shave often and wears a cap, perhaps because he is bald. He lives next door to us, but we never play with his daughter, Margaret Di Scipio, because she is not cool somehow. That is the lot of Italian immigrants in 1952. However there is nothing wrong with Margaret. I don't know who told me not to go near her. I do know my dad chuckles about Skipper behind his back, behind closed doors.

He also sneers about the neighbours on the other side of our house, the Comeau family, because they drink. My dad would often tell the story of Bill Comeau, the son, driving home on his motorcycle dead drunk and crashing into their garage. I know the Comeaus drink, because one day, I go into their house. They invite me in to watch television. They have a t.v. in their living room, as well as two sofas. There are no carpets, only hardwood floors, no pictures on the walls, and there are dozens of empty beer bottles behind the sofas along the walls. Anyway, that day, I am enjoying their company, watching t.v. with them, when my mother comes storming into the

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neighbours' house, grabs me by the arm and rescues me from a future life of crime. This time, my mother is the angel that keeps corruption outside the garden. About a week later, so that I won't go to the Comeau's house anymore, my dad comes home with a television set. Our first t.v., and Claire and I are weeping, because our father gave in and bought it for us. The first show we ever watch, in 1953, is the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The screen is minuscule, although the t.v. set is a huge piece of furniture, and I remember the black-and-white picture of the pomp and circumstance, as the horsedrawn golden carriage carries the Queen and Prince Philip up to Westminster Abbey. I am told I am the same age as Prince Charles, born in 1948.

And life goes on in our neighbourhood, with twenty-eight children living on one city block in the suburbs. These are mainly girls, so I play with girls. There is one other boy in our neighbourhood, Jimmy, who is my age and lives two doors down. He is a shy kid, who owns a collection of American comic books. I am not allowed

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to read Superman or Spiderman comics. Then there are the Jardines living diagonally across the street. Barry Jardine is my age, and is always beating me up. Brian, his brother, is my sister's age, and he is a monster and a world of trouble. To attract attention, he lies down in the middle of the street, with his arms out in a cross, lying flat on his back, whenever a car is coming up the hill – then as the car drives over him, he pulls in his arms, so they won't go under the car wheels. He is a daredevil. One night, it is Queen Victoria's birthday, in May, and the entire neighbourhood is out on the street, playing with firecrackers, and I see Brian Jardine place a lit firecracker in the rear hood of his father's jacket. The firecracker goes off, and of course, the father is furious. Another time, Brian is standing with other boys on top of our garage, and there is my mother, pleading with him to come off the roof, while he is throwing stones at her. So I get an image of delinquency at a young age, but I am generally well-behaved. I talk to my grandmother on the phone and I know when to look cute, just like any three year old kid.

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I know that one time, I walk up to my sister and innocently zip down my zipper and show her my penis, and tell her, “Now show me yours.” And my sister yells with all her might, from the bedroom, “MAMAN! MAMAN!” And that evening, my dad comes home from work and in front of the whole family, he pulls down my pants and gives me a spanking I never forget. Afterwards, I feel humiliated, and ask him why he had to spank my naked butt, and he says, strictly, “So it would hurt more.” And I am embarrassed forever.

There is a little girl in the neighbourhood called Vicky Pink. She is my best friend. I know she is Protestant, so I want to convert her to Catholicism, and we walk down the street to our church. At the front door, I pick her up by the waist and hold her up so she can see inside through the window. I know it is dark inside the church building and there are candles burning silently and serenely by the altars, and Vicky exclaims, “It is so pretty!” My mother has already been reading me the Bible since I was two years old. She has read

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me the story of Adam and Eve and the serpent in the garden of Eden, and the fairy tale about Samson and his long hair. I am soaking all this in... One day, my mother is hanging up laundry in the bathroom and I ask her, in French, "Who made the world?" She answers me, "God made the world." I reply, "Who made God?" And she says, "Nobody made God; he has always been there..." I look down the drain in the bathroom sink. "Always been there... always been there..." My little mind just expanded. My mind is blown.

But Vicky likes the attention of the boys. I see her and stand aloof in the alley, as she laughs wildly, while the little boys put pieces of black coal in her underwear. I don't see the point, I think they are being silly. I would rather play with my dinky toys inside our house. I always keep my toys obsessive-compulsively in order, and if anyone disrupts the order of my toys, there is a world war. One day, I find a pig's foot in the dirt in the alley beside our house, and I go all over the neighbourhood telling everyone I have found a fossil.

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My mother has taken us to the Museum of Man on McCord Street and I have seen the huge, fierce reconstruction of a tyrannosaurus rex. Another time, I find a British penny, with the image of the goddess sitting down, holding a scepter or something, and I tell everyone I found a Roman coin. What do I know? People don't like me in the neighbourhood however, the mothers say I should grow up to become a policeman, because I am so rough. I like to build imaginary cities in the sand in the alley, with roads and bridges for my dinky toys. I also have a mecano set and a set of wooden building blocks. I get absorbed in my toys and live in my own little world. I remember being an infant: my mother would sit me down in the sunroom while she was busy, doing god knows what, and I would sit there, in my diaper, spaced out, staring at the dust dancing in the sunlight coming in through the window, for what seems like hours. (One time, I get the cool idea of sticking a fork into the electric socket in the wall, and I go flying across the room. I don't remember the shock.)

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Another time, a boy and I are climbing a telephone post at the corner, and the other boy yells at me from above, "Jump, Robert!" and I fall about fifteen feet head first on the cement below. Next thing you know, I am in the hospital, and they are stitching up my eyebrow, where I landed on the ground that day. And I love being in the hospital. Nurses love little boys, they find them cute, and I get a lot of special attention, which I don't get at home. My mother is busy with housework and her high-society lady friends. She has them over for tea and a game of bridge every now and then.

And she invites a Haitian priest, Father Papaya, over for tea. Before he arrives, she is dressing me up in my finest little shorts and white shirt and a bow tie, and tells me, "Listen, Robert, there is a man coming here this afternoon, and he is black. I don't want you saying anything about the fact that he is black. OK?" And an hour later, the priest arrives and I come running out of the bedroom and see him. He is black, so I exclaim, "Hey, you're all black!" And he laughs, with his white teeth showing. He is amused, but I look at my mother, and she is turning different colours because she is

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embarrassed. My sister is more discreet. She asks him if people are all curly where he comes from.

And my dad? I love my dad more than my mom, and I tell her this – she is not too happy about it, as she struggles to do the laundry. When I am an infant, every morning, I weep loudly, as my father leaves for work. But one day at noon, my dad comes home from work for lunch, and the radio is playing a live speech by pope Pius XII. I exclaim, “Papa!” as my father walks in the door, and my father screams at me, in French, “Robert, shut up! The pope is on the radio!!” And I break out in tears. I get it. One day later on, I see a garbage truck, in Montreal, and I know that when I grow up, I want to be either a garbage man or the pope...

Then suddenly, there is trouble. I am often left unattended. My mother brings me to the basement, which is an unfinished room with a dusty cement floor, where I spend many hours rocking on my rocking horse, Doodah. My dad is rarely home. He is either at

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the office, five days a week plus Saturday mornings. At night, he is in the basement with the neighbour, Edouard Jodouin, printing pamphlets on the Gestetner machine, late into the night. On weekends, they often leave in Mr. Jodouin's car for Sudbury, Sault Sainte-Marie, Témiscamingue and Hawkesbury, where they found and manage French Canadian Catholic Parent-Teacher groups. They are teaching other parents how to raise kids, while my dad doesn't know how to bring me up. He takes me out fishing twice, and plays ball with me once. He is never there for me, but he gets decorated by the pope for his volunteer work.

One Sunday morning, Vicky Pink comes to our back door, where I am expecting her. She walks me over to her parents' place. It is still dark out. As we walk into her father's house, she tells me that her dad cut off his finger, but stuck back on again with water.

Somehow, I don't believe her. Her parents are still sleeping, so we have to be quiet. "SHHH." She takes me up into her bedroom, and lets me play with her toys in the closet. She tells me to turn around.

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And there is, standing bare naked by the window, just staring at me and expecting me to do something. The rising sun is shining on her. She is as naked as Adam and Eve. I look at her for a minute and notice how girls are made, and then I lose interest, tell her to get dressed and go back to playing with her toys in the closet.

On Saturday mornings, my sister and I go to the Civic Arts Center, for art lessons, and I learn how to draw and paint. On the other hand, my mom lies to me sometimes: she wants me to wear underwear, because Christ's disciples wore underwear – I don't believe her. There is already a credibility gap. Sometimes, my mom takes me to the National Gallery, and when I stand up close to the paintings, she tells me you have to stand eight feet away, and squint and look at the picture through your eyelashes, so it looks fuzzy.

Then there is the boy who steals bicycles. To make this story shorter, there is a thirteen-year old boy who keeps coming into our neighbourhood to steal the kids' bikes. One day, I decide to go with

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him and find out where he is hiding the stolen bikes. I will find the bikes and be a hero and all the little girls in the neighbourhood will like me. We walk down Basewater Road, where he takes me to the Experimental Farm, on the other side of Carling Avenue. I am not allowed to cross Carling. My mother told me so. And then I realize it is Sunday, as we are sitting in the grass in the park, and he is badmouthing the families that are having picnics on the hill nearby. He doesn't like the fact that these people go to church. He says they are all hypocrites. Then he proceeds to molest me and leaves me there. The serpent who enters the garden of Eden. A policeman finds me there, alone, and takes me back to my mother's house. As my mom opens the door and sees me standing with a policeman, she knows there is trouble, and I can tell by the wince of panic on her face. Then I remember driving through the Experimental Farm in the police car, with my mother freaking out in the backseat. I am more afraid of the policeman and the static on his car radio than of the child molester. I don't trust the policeman. I lie to him to cover up the molester. It is the first time I ever tell a lie. I think about it and make a decision to lie. I discover evil. I am plunged into an

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abyss of evil out of which it takes me years afterwards to emerge.

(And the cop tells my mother that I must never be told about this experience, but I do remember it when I am about sixteen.)

After that, I change. I keep getting into trouble. My mother will be washing her hair, and I run away. She always calls the police, who find me, perhaps a mile away. You can't run away from traumatic experiences. I am forever running away from the evil within, and I will do this as an adult. You have to keep evil Out There.

Meanwhile, my sister teases me a lot, and I tease her, but once she starts school, she is a born teacher and teaches me everything she learns in class, so that by the time I start kindergarten, I already know my alphabet and my numbers.

I want to write a poem when I am three, but can't get past the first line. And the neighbour upstairs, Mr. Slade, teaches me English that year, while we are gardening together. I speak international French,

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until I start school. I own about six books. But when I am a baby, I am hyperactive, so the doctor prescribes sleeping pills, which makes it worse. I am always jumping up and down and clanging the pots and pans with a spoon at five o'clock in the morning, which wakes up the whole family. But that is my way of expressing joy.

Now when I am five years old, a Vietnamese priest comes to live with us for nine months, while he is studying theology in Ottawa. He doesn't say very much to me. All his family has been murdered by the Viet Cong, whoever that is. He sleeps in my room, and I sleep on the sofa in the hall. His name is Father Nghat. He is a nice man. (Last we heard, in 1979, he had become bishop of Ho Chi Minh City but was under house arrest.)

One night, my sister comes home and tells us she saw some old winos down by the river camping by a fire. And I am fascinated. I want that. I want that adventure. I am looking for the wilderness. There has to be something more in life than the buffoons of bigotry

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and snobbishness. Something more than the angel who stands holding a fiery sword at the gates of the garden. My imagination is fired up at the thought of living in the bushes, by the railroad tracks, with semi-civilized individuals who can tell stories of distant lands and exotic lifestyles. There are two dimensions, home and the wilderness, and the wild is calling me. Home is repressive, with authority always breathing down your neck. Home is wandering into a church, like I do one day, and not being able to find your way out. And there is fear in your heart, if you dread what is out there, instead of exploring. At night, you look out the window, and it is dark, you can't see what is moving out there. It is calling you, calling you. You can't fence me in; my dad builds a fence around the backyard, and within one day, I have found three ways to escape. And the biggest fence is the lies they have told you: "thou shalt not." The weapon they use against you is to convince you that you are evil if you break their rules. My sister teases me by telling me there is a demon in hell called Robert, who will "get me." Are you a bad boy? Are you going to listen? They finally provoke you to rebel, to lash out, to steal, to fight and to go against your conscience,

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because by then you aren't sure what is true or right, after all. And the scapegoat is sent out into the wilderness, carrying all the sins of the community.

That is when heaven is moved to have mercy.

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## PART TWO

### THE FORTRESS AND THE CHAOS

Everything is in order now. I have built my city and nothing can destroy it. There are bridges and tunnels and roads and plenty of cars that travel there. There are also trucks and steam shovels and army jeeps. Unfortunately, my city is made of sand, and all the vehicles are nothing but Dinky toys. The rain can come anytime and the snow. Any adult can walk on my city and crush it.

My city is located in the alley beside our brick house, on the side of the Comeau family. It is my duty to protect the city, but the watchman waketh but in vain.

First, there is a gentleman in my dad's office whose wife is...

Whose wife is... (Don't ever mention that word, Robert.) My mom

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told me that Monsieur Savoie is coming to our house today. He is from some place called New Brunswick, and he is a translator, who works for my dad. And his wife is... Oh, it is terrible. She is not well in the head. She is like cousin Helen Smith. I hear she is a wicked woman and I should never call my children Helen, when I grow up, lest they should become wicked like Helen. And now there is a black cloud outside our windows, even in the daytime. There is a shadow in the corners that is evil. Don't mention that word, that awful word.

And another day, I decide to go to church and go to confession. I walk to our church and manage somehow to open the heavy door. I walk in and it is silent. There are candles burning by the altars of the saints. There are chandeliers and crosses everywhere. I knock at the door of the sacristy and an old man comes out. Out of nowhere. And I tell him I want to go to confession. I am four or five years old. He tells me to go home, with an old smile. So I walk all the way down the aisle, the main aisle up to the heavy door to get out – and

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it won't open! I am locked in. Now the building looks evil and scary. I am trapped! So what do I do? I cry. And the old man wearing a cassock and walking with a limp comes limping down the aisle and I see him coming, and he looks evil as he approaches.

Luckily, there is daddy. He takes me out for walks at night. We go down the street where the rich people live, and he picks me up by the waist and holds me over the hedges, so I can see the big houses, and he whispers in my ear, so only I can hear it, "Les Anglais. Les Anglais." And I guess that is where the English-speaking people live, in big houses behind hedges.

And he takes me out at night in August, to see the falling stars. That is magical. The sky is clear, there is no pollution. Falling stars. Sometimes things are just fine, like on summer nights, when the grownups set up a movie screen in our backyard with a projector and they play cowboy movies for all the kids in the neighbourhood, and everyone eats popcorn and hot dogs under the moon.

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My daddy sits me on his knee and plays horsey. Giddyup. Giddyup.  
And he smokes his cigarettes, lots and lots of cigarettes around me.  
And as a result, as long as he smokes, I always have lung and  
respiratory problems. I get bronchitis and pneumonia and  
whooping cough and coughs and colds. And he smokes.

Sometimes I have fits of croup asthma at night and I can't breathe,  
so the family doctor drives to our house and makes a house call at  
three o'clock in the morning, and he makes me breathe in steam  
from the kettle. Bad medicine, but whatever. It is dark, and my  
mother is worried. The doctor wears thick glasses.

My mother's aunt, ma tante Marie-Louise, is very, very old. She  
comes to visit and sits on the sofa and offers to give me a rosary,  
which she dangles in front of me, if I can tell her what I want to be  
when I grow up. I say I want to be a policeman, and she says, no,  
they shoot policemen. I say that I want to be a sailor, and she says,  
no, they whip sailors. And I go through a whole list of all the jobs I

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can think of, and there is one job I don't want – and I know that is the one she wants me to say. “OK, I'll be a priest.” (And I know I am betraying myself.) And she says, “Yes, you are a good boy. Here is a rosary for you.” And my mother applauds my choice. (And this is how the order of the theocracy is passed on in French Canada.)

And the forces of chaos are gaining on me. *Les invasions barbares.*

My cousin Jean is so small when he is born, that aunt Louise gives him a bath in the kitchen sink. But one night at their house, a couple of years later, at the top of the stairs, in the dark, while our parents are downstairs chatting, Claire gathers Jean and me, and we play confession. She decides we are going to have a contest to see who committed the worst sin. She begins, in French, “I killed a priest...” And Jean whispers, secretly, “I killed a bishop...” And I say, terrified, “I killed a cardinal...” And we are bound together with infantile chains of evil.

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Now I am in the hospital with pneumonia and I am a big boy. I am five years old. But they put me in the babies' ward, where the babies weep at night. I scream at them to shut up, but they are babies. My mother comes to visit me every day and tells me to be a big boy. I get needles and needles of penicillin in the bum. After a week, I have had scarlet fever, pneumonia and mumps simultaneously, and I can barely walk. I feel like I weigh a tonne. I am a big boy. I have been in the hospital for a week.

Sometimes, my mother takes me with her to the Italian neighbourhood, and she visits a lady there who has a son in school. I play with the little boy while mommy talks to the lady. I am in the dark about what we are doing there.

One day, some time later, ma tante Marie-Louise dies. I go to the funeral parlour. She is looking very dead in her coffin. She is not moving. I touch her, and her skin feels cold. A corpse. Death. Mortality.

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My father sings Gregorian chant around the house. He paces back and forth down the hall and says the rosary, which he holds behind his back. My mother sings opera. She plays opera on the radio.

One day, later on, my uncle Wilfrid plays some jazz for us on the record player. The records are old, made of lead, and about a centimeter thick. “Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho, Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, and de walls came a tumblin’ down.” Negro spirituals, he calls them. I am fascinated. A light just went on.

We all get together for Christmas every year, and the grownups drink and have fun. During the Christmas party, that goes on into the night, uncle Wilfrid, who is a priest, places a tape recorder under the sofa and records everything that is said and sung and all the laughter and silly talk. At the end of the party, he plays back the tape, on the big spools of the machine.

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One year, it is my birthday, and Claire and my mother are singing Happy Birthday for me. Suddenly, I realize this day is different than the rest of the year, they are acting nice with me for a change, and I burst into tears and go running into my room. And at Hallowe'en my mother and my sister dress me up as a girl, and I am furious that they are ridiculing me! Besides I keep tripping on the dress... (And if I weep, my father mocks me. This creates in me a sense of rage.)

Another thing the family likes to do is to make me talk crazy. I doze off to sleep while watching t.v. sometimes, and they talk to me while I am half-asleep. They all laugh because I say silly things in my sleep.

I also walk in my sleep, although I don't remember this. One night, I creep into my mother's bedroom and open the drawers of her dresser and pee behind the bedroom door.

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My dad will tell me many years later that my family is aware that I am different. He will also let me know I was an accident.

As a matter of fact, I am always having accidents or near accidents. For instance, my father's sister is called aunt Pauline, and she owns a cottage in Rawdon, Quebec, north of Montreal. We are invited there one summer, and Claire plays with her cousin Neil. They are forever running away on me. And one night, we are gathered in the cottage, and aunt Pauline sings me a song: "In a cottage in the woods, little deer by the window stood... Help me, help me, help me, said, or the hunter will shoot me dead... Come little rabbit, come with me, happy we will be..." or something like that.

Nevertheless, in the evening, the party is going on in the cottage and I step out. I walk down to the beach in the dark and wade in the water. I am very young and don't know how to swim. Suddenly, the ground caves in beneath my feet! There is a cliff underwater, where the shore drops! I fall through, and I am in a panic. It doesn't

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occur to me to call for help. But I kick my feet and move my hands, so I climb on the shore again and can walk out of the water. (While the grownups are busy partying, I am left unattended.)

One Sunday afternoon, the neighbours have us over, because their relative is a missionary in Africa, and he phones their family. Of course this is a big event, and all the kids in the neighbourhood get to talk to this man on the phone. This is in the days when French Canadians are missionaries. (In 2010, other countries send missionaries to Quebec.)

One time, Monsieur Jodouin, the neighbour, gives Claire a purple paper flower. I love flowers. I am sitting on her bed, while she is away, and I am contemplating the flower. But Claire comes running into the room and screams, in French, “Give that back to me!” And she grabs the flower out of my hands and runs off through the house. I run after her, through the kitchen, but she slams the glass door shut, and I ram my left arm through a window on the door

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and yank it back! The window smashes and a shard of broken glass gashes my left forearm and there is blood and broken glass all over the floor and my mother is screaming and wraps up my arm in a towel and I am taken off to the hospital. When I cut my arm, I can see the bone, under all the blood. They are nice to me in the hospital. The boy in the bed next to me loves to draw military airplanes, for some weird reason. They operate on my arm and I have a scar that will last for life.

The first time I kiss a girl, it feels funny, disgusting, wet, icky. It is Monique Jodouin. Sometimes at family picnics, she is lying on the grass in the park and spreads her legs for me, until her mother chastises her. We go on drives in their car, all through New England. As we leave in the car, we say the rosary for security on the road. Then we sing traditional French songs. "*Chansons à répondre.*"

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Of course, there are no seat belts in Monsieur Jodouin's car, and he always has me sit in the front seat. When he jams on the brakes, I inevitably go flying and bang my face on the dashboard and get a bloody nose. I don't think I like cars.

Monsieur Jodouin comes over to our house and makes up stories about hunting. Then he plays magic tricks. I know he is fooling with me and I don't like it. But he also makes faces and everyone finds him funny.

Monsieur Cabana, who lives next door to him, across the street from us, comes from Sainte-Hyacinthe, and my parents still remember his origins. Whenever he comes over to visit and leaves, my parents snicker behind his back, because he comes from a small town. His daughter Louise wants to become a nun. (Somehow, my parents figure these people are "lesser than.")

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Whenever we go to church, my father knows the ritual better than anyone else. The whole congregation may be sitting down, but my dad – and therefore, our whole family – is standing up. My father knows the mass better than the priest. This is always embarrassing. Kids are forever embarrassed by their parents. And during the mass, my dad sings louder than anyone else. He is really into it.

However, he has a friend called Mrs. Noblet, who mails me a plaid shirt for Christmas every year. My dad lived in her boarding house in Chateauguay before he met my mother. And she comes to visit every year and argues with my dad about religion. Sometimes when she comes, she is a Buddhist. Other times, she is a Jehovah's Witness. She changes her point of view every time. I am not supposed to listen to these arguments. And she goes for long walks in the pouring rain and does yoga. She is of Swedish descent, born in Turkey and was raised in England. She served in the British Intelligence during the war and her son is the CEO of International Nickel. She is an interesting lady who never gets any younger or any

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older. She has white hair. She wears a trench coat. She is supposedly eccentric, according to my parents. (Maybe she should be burned as a witch or a heretic.)

And this is our little shelter against the storm, this family establishment, that is as silly as any family. The walls are solid. No communist can break into our fortress. No customs are to be doubted. It is a real fortress. Mind you, there are angels watching over our fortress, but sometimes they are sleeping and neglectful. Sometimes, the problems are within. And the problem with exclusive shields is that they can't shut out the harm. The harm comes from within. We carry our upbringing and our environments inside our heads and we build dams that supposedly protect us against life. While my dad is busily resisting the environment, the disease and madness are within. The decay will wear out our armour soon enough.

Hickory Street.

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## HIS INSTRUMENT

Glad to meet you. I am a platelet. I travel through these veins and help heal sickness. Wherever there is a hemorrhage, I am sent there to mend things. I am known as Doctors Without Borders these days. We used to be known as angels. However this terminology got associated with social movements like colonialism and repression. I am a platelet and the brain of this planet sends me hither and thither. I am not an angel. Never was. I am flesh and blood. I am male and female. I see a lot of atrocities, but I am sure you can imagine those. My business is healing disease. There is a war going on, between life and death. Death always wins, on the long run. But that means more life is brought into this world body to sustain the balance. The end is not yet. Let's just say I would like to alleviate the suffering.

Feb. 20, 2010

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## THE MIRAGE

You are traveling through a foreign country by intercity bus, from province to province. You have been off your soma long enough to begin seeing through things – the effect of this medication is to confirm a sense of lazy reality about your perception. Now you have lapsed into a virtual fortress of words and images sustained by the constant chatter of the other passengers on the bus, who have been watching television and listening to preachers and going to school and gossiping with the neighbours and talking over supper concerning what is news and what is true and what matters. (You used to be followed by a doctor, who is basically a parole officer.)

You have your own baggage of virtual reality , so that the local State becomes West Germany, and the farms along the highway become

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concentration camps, and the movie the bus is traveling through has layer upon layer of deception, and you are seeking the Ultimate Reality, the image behind the movie screen.

You are on the run. Running away from the past of satellites that follow you around. However, there is some degree of reality in your perceptions. You sense this land protects itself against foreigners and aliens and potential dissenters by projecting a smoke screen, a red herring, a mirage of disinformation. You have stopped watching television and movies for a few years. You have come to realize everyone is brainwashed into staring in dark air-conditioned rooms at large screens, that distract the public from the evil that is within. The myth is that the enemy is out there, stalking the local people, waiting to take over and murder their wives and children in cold blood, once and for all. This enemy has agents right within this bus.

By keeping us paranoid, the system keeps citizens unaware of angels and oil spills and nuclear and chemical tests on their own territory

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that ruin the soil and make women give birth to monsters, the criminal porno movies that begin with the national anthem, and the caste system that keeps most people oppressed. Only one in many millions of people becomes an idol, a beast six six six, standing larger than life like a movie hero, like the statues of Mao you heard about, a hundred feet tall.

Hey, I am the threat out there. I live in a tent in Pakistan, but I am really dangerous. “The revolution as myth is the definitive revolution.” And: “There is a specter haunting Europe, and that specter is communism.” I am a real threat to the billionaires who manipulate, run government and lend money to government in order to better control its politics. And these billionaires are nowhere to be seen, they live in the Bahamas.

Meanwhile, Karl Marx and Walt Whitman must be turning over in their graves, as I travel on the bus, psychotic, hallucinating about oil, riding down the highway, through season after season, through

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nuclear landscapes, through the moon. It is all stolen land anyway, full of graves and crucifixes, full of skulls. .Look, there is Fidel Castro, he is dying and riding next to you on the bus, with his graying beard, he is mumbling something about sustaining the revolution, about imperialism, about the revolution.

What will be left of this land in a century or two? Socrates is mortal. All men are mortal. Therefore all men are Socrates, right?

Sept. 11, 2009

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Clifford Duffy as Orpheus



Clifford Duffy  
as Orpheus  
resurrecting from  
Hades

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## Colin Columbus



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## WAITING FOR THE BUS

I am waiting for the bus to eternity. It is 8:30 p.m. on a Wednesday night in March. We have had a mild winter, but the air still feels damp. The sun has gone down, it is dark, and there is a single star I can see above the rooftop across the street. The night is vast and empty, yet full of possibilities, as I launch on a spiritual quest.

This quest begins every time you see through your current situation. First, you have to despair of conventional values and whatever cult – established or marginal – you are involved in; then suddenly, the night opens up, not with angels singing, not with flying saucers landing, but with little lonely people you see hobbling along, carrying their grocery bags, with crazy young teenage girls dressed to the nines and off to party, with the young black man walking by at a rapid pace as he motormouths on his cell phone, visibly talking to himself as he walks off into the darkness of the cement jungle.

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There are so many little universes exploding and happening, lonely people who don't notice me, of course, and maybe don't notice the Creator watching them go about their business. Then there is a pretty woman walking by, clutching her purse, avoiding any eye contact as she scurries by, afraid of rapists, purse snatchers, hustlers – men. The night is calling me.

I am leaving behind my friends. I am not going anywhere, and yet I am like Columbus leaving shore to go discover a new land. Like Jacques Cartier. Like the first astronauts, off to discover new moons. Like the first First Nation people a long time ago, leaving behind Siberia and landing on a new continent. I am going. The night is calling me.

'Seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.'

I am sorry, but I am leaving you behind with your industrial nightmare, your air-conditioned nightmare, as Henry Miller called it,

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your neon meatdream of an octafish, as Captain Beefheart called it, many years later. I have worked in your factories and your restaurants and your offices. I am on sick leave, on spiritual leave, on unemployment insurance, off to Bethlehem to seek the Master, I am heading for India to find a guru, I am pointing towards Mecca, although that is not too popular in North America these days, I am leaving this earth behind to go explore the stars in search of the truth, in search of a better country.

But my feet are still on the ground. I have business to attend to, a family to raise, bills to pay, the landlord is hungry, he wants his rent on time, I need my bus pass to board the bus to eternity. My feet are still on the ground. I am not taking a geographical cure, I am not traveling geographically. This trip will take place in my heart, without a pill, without a syringe, without a bottle. I am already drunk on the stars, which are whispering to me, 'Robert, there is something else. Come and find us. Leave this rotting world behind. This planet can't satisfy you. Its goals, its rewards, its riches are as

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poor as this poor neighbourhood in which you are waiting for the bus.’

I look around. What do I see, but asphalt, cement, bricks, empty windows, cars whizzing by, streetlights blink blink, blink blink, and the odd pedestrian shuffling by, concealing a whole universe of secrets.

I am thirsty, not for booze, not for adventures, but for a deeper truth, which is Atman and Christ in my heart, a truth which looks like me, in whose image I am created, a divinity which is present already and yet summoning me to court, with this subpoena to eternity. Hey, Smith, God is calling you. You haven’t got him in your pocket. You haven’t found him in your books.

This ultimate divinity is present in the desire you feel to go beyond. To set foot on a new continent of faith. To claim a truth of your own, for yourself.

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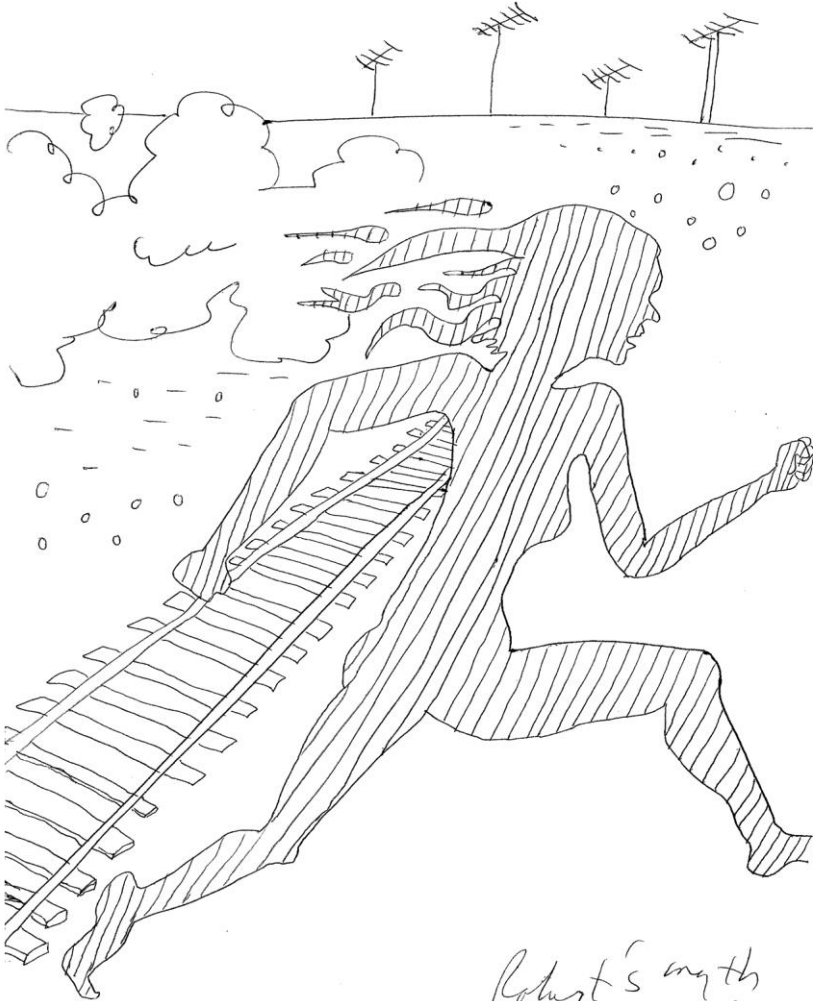
This is every person's birthright.

March 11, 2010

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## Speed of Light



Robert's my th  
2011

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Untitled



Robert Smith  
07.10

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