

A wheatfield outside Vittorio Veneto, Italy  
Reflecting on last summer

6 December 2009

Is there pride in a tall reach of wheat blowing here and there in the sultry breeze? Is there pride in the lush green of a firm stalk of corn steadfast amid the growing crop? And of ancient farmer who takes whet stone to scythe, is there malice? As the blade shines into sharpness, is there purpose in the handheld stone, as a knowing eye measures? Between the wheat, the stalk, and scythe – a measurement is taken by the eye of the ancient farmer. But what had been seen and known when fair scythe was raised?

Every sinner knows it is a passing season sown of a stolen hour. And the crop is harvested for purpose. The sinner is harvested for meaning. There is no mystery. It whispers in the sultry breeze; shimmers in the green of crops, and appears in the stain of the stolen hours.

The mystery for the latter lies in a simple fact: it is with closed eyes that stolen pleasures pass. And the passing scythe sings before it strikes - even upon the blind.

Capella Maggiore, Italy  
Vineyard

19 December 2009  
Glorious snowfall

The yard and surrounding village are blanketed in pristine whiteness. The nearby farmhouses are shuttered tightly. A lone trail of gray rising lazily from ancient hearths. The snow began around 03:00. I felt it before I knew it: I can always feel changes in the sky. It awoke me and I looked out. It snowed until 15:00. The frenzied birds on the sill are ever more ravenous, which brings me to occurrences of the last few days concerning wingéd things.

First, there is the robin, maybe two, that seem to know I exist. At times, when I come home from the base, after putting the car in the drive, this robin will alight upon a nearby branch and sing. The song is so eloquent that I must stop in the pace of life to open my soul to joy. There have been times when I came home with M in the car, the robin would alight nearby, but it does not sing unless I am alone.

Further, in the late evening, after the rolladins (metal shutters) have been lowered, the robin will land upon the sill of the room where I am: kitchen, living room, bathroom, or bedroom. M has noted with amazement that this bird seems to know, even with the shutters down, which room I am in.

These strange occurrences have intrigued the analytical and intuitive aspects of my design but not to wholly convince me that this bird has a specific intent or behavior directed at me. Nor do I believe it is all coincidence.

While at Edelweiss in Bavaria on the morning we were leaving, I was waiting for an elevator to take me to the lower parking garage. It was about 06:30. As I waited, I glanced to the right through a large plate glass window. I saw the slow descent of snow in the glow of streetlights. Then, something else, something moving in flight quickly attracted my gaze.

It was but a moment before it struck that I barely discerned the flapping wings of a blackbird. It struck the glass, thwack, at my eye level and fell. I went to the glass. Its black wings fluttered slightly before falling to stillness. I thought to go outside to aid the creature but worried if, in its dazed state, it might attack me.

I took the bags to the car hurriedly. After depositing the luggage, I took the stairs up two flights and gazed through the glass: nothing. I stepped outside and walked to where the blackbird had fallen – it wasn't there. I crouched to examine the snow, to see if I could discern a vague trace of its wings on all that white.

“Everything all right, sir?” a voice asked from behind me. A young man who worked for the hotel stood, a bundle of *Stars and Stripes* in his hands, looking at me curiously crouched looking into the snow.

“I thought I saw something,” I mumbled. “Like what?” I shook my head, “Not sure.” There wasn't a single sign of disturbance in the snow. Not even a black feather. I returned to the room to get the rest of the luggage. I did not bother to mention the occurrence to her.

Several days later, after I parked my car, I walked the small path towards Aviano High School (ELA). I thought I saw something move on the path. At first, I thought it was a mouse. Then it flitted onto the path right in front of me. I stopped, focused on what had moved: it was a bright red robin. It struck me as very odd. I assumed it had been injured.

“Poor bird,” I whispered and pulled off my black glove. “Are you hurt?” I took a small step. It remained perfectly still and then uttered a sharp click-chirp. I leaned forward, slowly, to gently touch the robin. Just as my fingertips touched atop its softly feathered head, a chirp, then it flitted, landing atop a nearby stone wall. I felt the flutter of its wings on my fingertips. It turned and looked at me, now two click-chirps. I stood puzzled, contemplating the Universal in the

particulars of a moment. I touched a robin.

There we stood, me and the crimson singer, the sun peeking over snow-capped Piancavallo, lending brilliance to the redbreast. Several passersby turned as the robin began to sing out. I stood rapt as a child, a gleeful smile. “He singing to you?” a woman asked as she passed, bundled against the Dolomiti chill.

“I don’t know, but it’s beautiful.” I listened a moment longer and then whispered, “Thank you, Meistersinger.” I bowed in thanks. The bird flew off. I proceeded into the warm high school asking myself, “Had it actually been me who’d crossed the robin’s path?”

I could not describe but was certain the event held some meaning if I could grasp it. That ephemeral import seemed to lie in the robin’s landing right in front of me: a symbolic gesture for me to alter my step, and to do so soon. I wondered if I were not silly or foolish to esteem a chance occurrence for a life-examining moment – if solely – perhaps, but the patterns embedded in the passage of my life, than yes.

And this, long after the strange occurrence on Hodson Bay, Ireland, when my dear daughter, knee-deep in the sun warmed bay, witnessed those moments between her father and a white swan. Twice.

I must admit that I have seen all my life – strange signs – signs from and for a messenger, and chose to disregard these mysteries. Believing myself far unworthy of any momentary revelations or gentle graces. But there are moments when my life calms, clarity comes, and I glimpse Beauty as my life’s message.

But a black bird crashing into glass mixes with the bird that was not injured. I can barely glimpse the surface context. Only to say that these moments are for me to see. Beyond seeing, what is there? Simply this; I do and always have expected moments like these. They have always come. Nature always finds the child-hearted who can see.

What has not arrived is my belief in their message. This says more about the person I am: one who defaults to blindness when extraordinary vision is granted. Why? That – lies in the heart. The place where the click-chirps from winged things are solely speaking to me but the mind interrupts hope.

Ceneda, Italy  
Café: window seat

26 February 2009  
Cold, gray rains

A figure like a twisting cord rises in the dream chamber: the outer portion of the cord is rough and beginning to loosen, to come undone, like twisted bridge cables fraying from the outside. The inner aspect is not twisted but runs straightly on the inside, shaped by the outer layer, like a coil, but compact to maintain, to contain: each fiber of the inner forms an elongated strip of memory.

Its core, shifting to inner strands; there, the oldest part of the whole. These primary three strands tightly fitted, faintly pulse the upper strands in shifting darkness, inside which is complete darkness.

The other two of the primary three strands: the left carries sound, the right carries fragments of decaying images: of places, faces, and passing scenes, as seen from and through a thousand windows all framed in the silence of the just awakened mind.

Outside this primary triad, clustered in arc-circling strands, these are the blood-three, and the nearest, as it feels to me is of her. It is inside this strand which pulses of specific unity – equal parts – of her and I that arises in dreams and in daylight. It intrigues inquiry. We share, of late, unique changes in our bodies (as I wrote of earlier) – even in the same areas of our physical being.

In still moments, I contemplate the import of such connections; are we, she and I, unraveling from life at the same rate, in the same manner, hurdling toward a proximal end? For in her strand, which lies nearest to me, I begin to sense (I believe) a linear shift, a movement away, which for months I thought resided solely in her. I failed to suspect it may lie with me, setting into motion the possibility of one preceding the other.

What is it that moves in us, in the flesh and bone that shifts to the same temporal tide, but the weakening of individual matter. To what does this attest in the mystery of being: a bond that runs far deeper than matter. Perhaps a bond forged in the depths of something noncorporeal; the strand within the strands that unites all: from within and without – to all others.

There is a great uncoupling in motion here. I feel it inside the thoughts I dream. Now pain comes. Pain seeded in the oldest part of the strand: when we were at our youngest. But the weight of these years hardened us, but in our flesh –

an exchange continues. I see anew that July day in '64, hands held as we walked slowly down that long alley towards the sounds of pool water splashing, barbecue smoke and strangers laughing. We held tightly for all journeys from the orphanage.

But now something, unlike then, pulls at our hands. At our bond. All that we did to ourselves because of what others had done, is wearing us under, the sum effect of a denial that ransoms survival.

For us both, if there were a truth in it all, neither of us ever had the courage to look at it. For me, it is all that I carried and left untouched. Unsaid for too long as I carried a glowing coal through the dark.

For her – she'd passed along wrath of word and wrath of hand (better to kill one's self than ever hurt a child). These habits should have been killed. And so it was 'that' which seeped into the earliest strands of our being that condemns us now; perhaps to recede at merely different rates. To head back up that alley into the cruel face of that July sun, only months apart.

Who will be the one waiting at the curb for the other? It lingers in the expanding cold that shifts around the deepest strand. But in this end, we will be stepping off together. But how this is all moving in us both mysteriously, I cannot fathom. Work of pain or miracle of grace? Or just the weariness of two children who held on to each other for too long?

St. Augusta's Sanctuario

19 March 2009

Sadness when Beauty leaves,  
a grayness that grieves.  
All becomes echoes of  
brighter moments  
of sparkly shores  
of roses tossed  
tears dried –  
All being is Beauty leaving.

Bolzano, Italy  
A closed café

21 August 2009  
hottish

It was after noon. Nothing was opened. Everyone at siesta. I looked in one shop. The door was opened with only a beaded curtain. I didn't part the curtain. I saw a young woman sitting there, a gold cat at her feet. Our eyes met and I turned away.

The chair scraped. I paused, thinking, 'Maybe...' She rose to shut the door. I looked back as she stood at the beaded curtain. Our eyes locked, moving from head-to-toe. She smiled like she'd known me a long time. Her eyes were green like the ocean. She parted her curtain and motioned with her head to 'Come in.'

As I passed, our eyes met again. She smelled so wonderful. The room was dark. She eased behind the bar and leaned forward. Oh yes, she did lean and asked, "What can I do for you American?" Her accent was as sultry as her beauty. I just could not think of my Italian lessons. I could not remember what I'd wanted. Then I recalled it, an *espresso*. It's a nice lift on a hot summer's day. I did not answer. My eyes fell on the *espresso* machine, tall and shiny. She nodded, smiled and began prepping the sleek machine. I still had not spoken. It was all in her eyes.

"Cat got your tongue?" At that moment her goldish cat swirled around my tan legs. We shared the laugh. It was a nervous laugh for me. I was melting. She eased around the bar, a foot away. "Anything else I can do?" Speechless and still - I stood.

Later, we sat quietly at the bar as the machine steamed and white froth erupted in bursts. It was the best coffee I ever tasted of my seven years in beautiful Italy.