

Remembering

Moo Cows Coming Down the Road

I remember Takoo in his middle years speaking wistfully of the *moo cows* he remembered *coming down the road*. The thing is, I was there when it happened and they were dogs. From his earliest days Takoo was extremely short-sighted—cow, dog, horse, were all the same to him. What matters is “what I remember”, is what he would say, and that is *the road*—cows are a detail. Except—and not to make too big thing of it—the dogs were coming down the steps of the library. Anyhow and the point is, Takoo was never stuck up about the facts.

Stein said, repeatedly, that Takoo could make a lot of sense, would make a lot, made and unmade sense and non-sense, non but not non, non and not non, and the road is a thing, thing, thing—he could make it, if he’d grow up or change his name. Stein, herself, set a pretty low bar in the meaning department and always gave facts a wide berth.

Molly, Tak’s Spanish girlfriend, understood him completely, which made no sense and my therapist said to stay away from her *and yes I said yes I will Yes*. But I didn’t.

The Photograph

The earliest thing I remembered was having my picture taken by a real photographer. And I have the photograph to prove it. I vividly recall the visit to the studio with the special hot lights. It was on the second floor over a store in Wilkinsburg. We entered at street level and went down a long hall and up some stairs, which I climbed all by myself. I was all dressed up by my Mom, in short pants, a double-breasted peacoat with gold buttons. In the photo I am sitting on a stool. Which proves my astonishing memory. I was about two years old, if two-year-olds can climb stairs. My therapist said he was concerned because the verisimilitude of the photograph to my memory distorted the synapse cross-switch and overloaded the dopamine so true memories are possibly contaminated. Which is to say, I was trapped in a narrow reality and not focusing on his nexus/connexus which was which of my mothers burned off my penis with her cigarette lighter. He was a real Jungian.

The Snake

I remember the summer I was three. I was in the cottage getting a cookie and heading back down to the dock, when I spotted a giant brown snake weaving the path for a swim. So I thought. Dad was away and mom was down on the dock and I hid under my bed.

After a long while of silent terror I went out to look. Mom was sitting on the dock looking at an apple and listening to the snake who was swimming about with his head about a foot out of water talking a mile a minute. I know now it was not merely “an apple”—it was “the apple”!

Dad was away. Did I already say that?

The conversation went on for quite a while. I snuck down the hill and hid behind a rock and listened. I couldn’t hear a lot but I did hear the snake say Mom should have a bite of the apple, that it was a good source of Vitamin D and she would make her smarter. I couldn’t hear much of what Mom said, except ... “not a good idea” and she that she wouldn’t unless Dad said it was OK. After a while they agreed to disagree. It was all very civilized, a high-concept conversation. Then snake swam away and Mom went back up to the cottage.

I stayed hidden behind the rock until after Mom was safely inside the cottage and then I went in the water looking for the snake. He found me and we got to talking. The guy had a lot of insight but you had to listen very carefully because he spoke with a lisp; something was wrong with his tongue. At that point in my life—and I admit my immaturity—having a lot of knowledge in a hurry seemed like a good thing. Anyhow after our talk I went back up the hill to the cottage. The apple was sitting on the counter in the kitchen. So I took a bite, several, actually, I ate the whole damn thing. You should know that Mom and Dad didn’t even get a taste. This is an important thing to remember.

The result was more or less immediate, as you must know. I became brilliant. Poor Mom and Dad, until their dying days they insisted an apple was a round and red thing used to ward off doctors.

Later, when Dad came home I told him about the snake and not to worry because I now had special powers, which he didn’t, which I couldn’t explain exactly but they included how to break a cottage lease. Then he picked me up and took me back down to the lake and threw me in, jumped in after and tried to drown me. The snake joined in, on my side. Mom heard the commotion and came back down to the lake, more or less cheering on the snake. There was a tremendous and noisy struggle. Eventually I broke free, got back up on the dock and watched dad duking it out with the snake. Then the guy we were renting the cottage from heard the ruckus and he came down to the dock, pissed as hell. “Out”, he thundered, “Out, out!”

And so we had to leave the beautiful cottage and the sylvan lake and wear clothes and go to school and live in the suburbs.

Three Friends

It is factually correct that I had three imaginary friends when I was small-ish. They were Marion, Ballard and Go-Go. Marion was well-balanced, Ballard was uptight and Go-Go was rude and naughty. They played their appointed Freudian roles, ego, alter ego and id, to perfection. At four I understood the yin and yang of their complex relationship—because I had bitten early into the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Late in life I became a Jungian but we stayed friends.

Ballard didn't go to church. However, every Sunday he told me why I mustn't miss ever. He made me collect Attendance Certificates from Sunday Schools I attended when we traveled and bring them back to ground-zero Methodist Sunday School as proof. Go-Go pooped in his pants long after he didn't need to—just because—and stuffed mashed potatoes down the funnel of Dad's electric train, long before terrorists were sabotaging the subway systems. And Marion told Dad, "Go-Go was really sorry but wouldn't say so until after Dad was dead" and she took him—Dad—to the model train store on the way back from church, which was just beside the ice cream store, and bought him a new caboose.

Go-Go had a very rough time of it as a young guy. I was constantly protecting him against the other two. My therapist says there is no "fourth I" in the "equation of three" and I am confusing myself with Marion in a re-imagining of my subconscious which has become altogether corrupted by exogenous professional values. I think this is insightful. Facts are useful, he says, if used selectively, very sparingly and with a huge dollop of imagination. Go-Go was pretty much a klutz at sports and was badly bullied by Ballard and took his own sweet time to manure. But he did.

Mom liked Marion the best, ignored Ballard and loved Go-Go blindly. Dad said he liked Ballard but I seriously doubt he was sincere. Ballard had him by the balls because Dad never went to church. And Dad hated Go-Go who was too close to Mom. My three friends had tasted the forbidden fruit and were in on something Dad didn't grasp. He thought good and evil were separate things.

Mixed Up

My father confided in me on my fourteenth birthday that his wife, who had always told me and everyone else that she was my mother, was not in fact my mother. There had been one of those extraordinary mix-ups in the maternity ward when I was born, between Room 6-C and Room 14-F, and he had brought home the wrong wife. Just after childbirth, Dad said, mothers looked very similar—tired—and subtle things, like hair colour get missed when you are stressed, as he was, after giving birth.

A year before he died he admitted to me that he knew that his 14-F wife was blond and the one in the car from 6-C was black-haired. But commenting on a woman's appearance in a feminist hospital was the kiss of death. The thing is, both answered to Margery.

My personal recollections are decidedly murky.

Years later when they came to grips with the mistake they decided it wasn't a true mistake because they both thought the baby had improved their relationship.

Both women were named Margery and both men named Bill. In a sense this was too good to be true because it helped put the subsequent events on more an even keel.

It was also a weird kind of good luck, dad said, that by coincidence the other couple—thrown together by fate—confused and dazed leaving the hospital, were both killed by a No. 501 streetcar. The baby, the real me, so to speak, survived but with severe amnesia and was taken back to the hospital. I had already gone home with dad and the new Margery. In fact they didn't even know of the deaths because there was at the time no contact, indeed no reason for it, they were in 14-F. It was a kind of blessing for mom because she was spared the shock and grief of the passing of her real husband in the company of "another woman". For my part, I was totally unaware at the time that my real mother had died. I had only seen her for a very few moments. We weren't close.

And as for baby #2, he was placed in orphanage but at such a young age he suffered no real sense of loss, at least so he told me later. All this had an upside and wonderful surprise for him because at age fourteen he learned he had a real alive mother somewhere out there, albeit one who was rather ambivalent about his existence. At least at first. When the hospital phoned and told Dad of the mistake he took in stride. He liked Margery Two quite a lot. He took on the task of locating his real son. And on my fourteenth birthday, my Dad told me his real son had been discovered living in an orphanage in Wichita. He had pictures. Indeed the guy looked a lot like my dad, much more so—much, much—than I did. Which stands to reason.

Dad was never good at hiding his feelings. I could tell he wanted his real son. He didn't say out loud that he was thinking of sending me to Wichita on a trade. When I was eleven he threatened to put me on waivers. But I knew without him saying it. I knew that he had always hoped for someone better at football than me, even a running back, if he was lucky. I was pretty much a klutz at sports, more into metadata and macroeconomic modeling.

One weekend dad told me we were going to "a game". This always meant football. To make a long story short the game was an interstate high school semifinal in St Louis—and guess who was the tight end. I am not making this up! Dinner was arranged after the game. To "meet" and get acquainted.

Gary was his name. He was already 6'1" and 180 pounds, no pimples and serious fuzz on his chin. I can't think of words to describe his shoulders. He knew every player in the NFL and likely draft picks five years out. And he brought with him his friend, Duncan, the mastermind, quarterback, who was a little smaller, not much, and with a handshake

that broke my little finger. Dad was in tenth heaven. The two of them had been together in the orphanage all their lives and were “inseparable”, Duncan said. He knew a good thing when he saw it.

I tried to steer the conversation to whether the curve of time was elliptical or spherical, without success. The arc of the long pass was another matter.

The next day we drove them back to Wichita to the orphanage. Dad cried when we left. And then talked non-stop on the way back about what a great program they had at the orphanage in physics and math.

It was pretty clear, I was marked as the short end of a two-for-one trade, a tight end and promising QB for a macroeconomic modeler. I finally got the word from the football coach at school who could hardly wait to get the two of them on the field and he insisted that he had heard from a guy that the new stats prof at the Wichita orphanage junior college was a priest who apparently moved around the country to different postings quite regularly, without a forwarding address.

And then about a week later Dad got a letter saying his real—deceased—wife’s uncle had left a substantial trust fund in his will for the benefit of “nephews of the blood”, of which there was only one—the guy in the orphanage—with power to encroach vested in his mother for the benefit of the nephews (of which there was only one) with substantial administrative fees, provided she was lawfully married, and the corpus passing directly and in total at age forty.

Mom was fond of me in her way and was at first against the trade until she heard about the limitations on the trust fund, in that her power to encroach on capital was only in favour of Gary. She explained how unfair it would be—to me—because she could only spend the money on Gary. Dad’s thought was that it would be terrible to split up such an incredible pair, that is, Gary and Duncan. Mom and Dad thought they could afford two because Gary could give money to Duncan if he wanted. Mom beat me a few times and gave me some of the white pills and I signed the papers. And so at age fourteen I moved to the orphanage. I came home once a month and slept in the garage. Gary thought incest was a sin but Duncan became like a brother and fucked me every time.

This seems like a sad story by all the norms of happy nuclear families but it is not. I got on extremely well with my statistics prof, whom I called Father, at the orphanage, and when the Cardinal moved him to Los Angeles a year later he smuggled me out of the orphanage in his army duffel bag and I moved to L.A. with him. He had a large walk-in closet where I could sleep when I wasn’t out on smack deliveries for him. And once a month Father would tie me and bag me and put me in the trunk and drive me back to the old family garage for my monthly visits because he missed sucking off Gary, and Duncan liked to have me after football games. If our scheduling got off and Gary and Duncan had an away game we went anyhow. We’d watch their game on the local TV station and then Father and Dad would spit roast me in the garage and Mom would

handle the electrodes. All things considered we thought we were hanging together pretty well as a family. Mom gave Gary a Maserati for his sixteenth birthday with money from the trust fund less her finder's fee.

Then one time Mom, Dad's Margery called me and said that it turned out that the other Margery had not in fact died in the bus crash but had suffered a head injury from which she had recovered and was now wanting to get in touch with my Dad, and this raised privacy issues with the agency because it was my nuclear family that was affected and might be upset and what did I think.

As you can image, this gave ethical pause for me, nourished as I was, from the very beginning, on the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. I tried to focus on the key issue, how would Dad feel being exposed as a bigamist? And, only secondarily, how would I *feel* if bus-crash Mom came to visit during one of our post-game garage parties. And it wasn't just me and Dad. There was Father! He was getting a monthly stipend from Mom for keeping me safe in the closet in L.A., which was in jeopardy if she lost her administration fees. And then... what about Gary? If it was an away game he wouldn't be there to hook up with the fake Mom.

Yes, it gave me pause but not that long a pause. With my special apple-based knowledge of good and evil and finely tuned sense that the difference between them is slight, I realized that if Dad's real wife was not dead, then, the marriage to Mom was bigamous and void and she would therefore be disqualified as the guardian of her son Gary's trust fund with the substantial administrative fees running for another twenty years. I knew that what Dad would want would be that I should kill the first wife, my real Mom, so the marriage to second wife, my fake Mom, but Gary's real Mom, could be continued, as lawful and the terms of the trust be fulfilled and the administration fees continue. So I started making plans for something quick and painless, I mean it was hardly her fault.

Then a Commandment came, out of the blue, to Dad. It was to kill Mom with the money and bury her in the back yard with the others. He was devastated. The Mom with the money was his recent favorite. But the voice was clear and when the bugle sounded, Dad—so to speak—Dad was an obedient toy soldier.

Myself, I thought, *somebody* is not paying attention! Not a good sign. But still, it solved the problem of whether to tell Dad about bus crash Mom. Answer—Yes but only after the thing with Mom. And she could be a kind of consolation prize.

So one day in December Father and I tied Mom up in a spare body bag and hauled the bag up on the mountain. She was hollering and screaming and threatening to change her will. We gave her no chance for that. We gagged her and laid her out on a big tree stump and I fetched Dad and gave him an axe.

He was just about to strike the fearsome blow in obedience when the snake appeared and said, "Alright, already! Enough. Enough! Just testing you. You can keep the Mom with the money. But you can't have both!"

Dad was instantly relieved. He was quite fond of the mom with the money. As noted, his affection for her was not solely because of her cooking.

But then he said, "What do you mean 'both'?"

The Snake didn't answer but wrote a prescription on two stone tablets, things to do and not do, that sort of thing. They were kind of heavy and Father had to carry them down the mountain for me. When we got to the bottom I showed them around to the people in the trailer park. We've used it ever since when we don't have any apples. That's another story.

Bus crash Mom was waiting at the bottom of the mountain. She was looking good, maybe a bit slutty, given twenty years in a coma and three weeks at a cheap spa in Missouri. "Hi, I'm Margery. Remember me?"

Gary arrived just then in his Maserati, hollering, "Garage party! Garage party!"

Dad said, "Sure do!
Margery, this is Margery."

And I said, "First Commandment, Pop, right here—'thou shalt not commit...'"

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