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“DREAD”

JON BENJAMIN

INK WASH

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The Theory of the Red Thread: Geography and the development of knowing...Value

PHILLIP HOLSINGER

"Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?"
-William Blake

"Then It’s Tommy this, an’ Tommy that,
An’ Tommy, ‘ow’s your soul?
But it’s thin red line of ‘eroes’,
When the drums begin to roll."
-Rudyard Kipling

I have this personal theory based on the mapscape of our personal geography. It goes like this: Imagine when you were born a tiny red thread is tied to your ankle. Every where you go this tiny thread trails behind, infinite in length, forming a web that is a map of where you have been. I imagine this web is a pattern that can be viewed as if on an interactive monitor. A pattern can be followed explaining behavior, revealing values. Simply plug in your footsteps and print out a bird’s eye view of the pattern which is your life.

I imagine the first ten years of my life and I see my house blood red with the marks of my movement. So tightly woven are the threads they become a single red blob that takes a microscopic viewing to distinguish exactly where each thread travels...whether to the sofa or to my father’s knee. There are single blood red bars out of my front and back doors stretching out into the neighborhood, shrinking and separating, separating into individual lines has a thick red path across the street and up into the hills. My red line actually travels quite thickly up the side of a high rock to cliffs towering hundreds of feet above my town.

This was the movement of my person as a young boy. While others played in the alleys I climbed the hills...often alone, keeping company only with the trees. There is significance in this path into the woods and the trees and to the hill top, any scientist would agree. Then the thread reaches out from my neighborhood along the roads, heading East and West. A tiny line of red travels to the hospital, but a thick red rope runs to the door of the First United Methodist Church. In the summer months a scarlet path cuts across the town to the public pool. An even thicker rope leads to my school and inside the halls, down every corridor, shading red nearly every corner with the history of my footsteps. The
thread during this time is confined, though...never traveling far from where I lived (we didn’t vacation). My path in the first ten years is confined to the region of my birth and occupies a single house.

Follow the thread through my life till now to investigate values I have held, appetites, confusions I have battled. Follow a thin red line from the church service to the car to the riverside and into the backseat with a girl one teenage night in November. The red line tells a story in and of itself...a pattern revealing the nature of my habitation. Zoom out or Zoom in to learn more, to gain a different perspective. You might imagine the pattern of the thread can be viewed as if by some computer imaging allowing you to come close to a geography or to pull back, rise above for a bigger picture of the pattern. At a height only the repeated journeys, the heavier travel is visible, the single trips lost to sight. A boy’s life viewed as the greatest significance (a life altering event), the results are evident in the height of the pattern not in the revelation of the single event. It is the tangle of thick red threads occupying the places that follow which interpret the significance of the event-threads leading to an asylum, perhaps, or a monastery. Zoom into British Columbia to a "strip" joint in a suburb of Vancouver where my thread has followed me. Years later you can view this passage if you look close enough. Zoom out and the thread disappears, a single line indistinguishable in the web of my movement within movement within an obscure foreign landscape. Zoom in again even closer to never venturing to the stage side. It is not a statement of innocence, but a revelation of interests. Zoom out again, but not too far...compare the thickness of the web in all of the movement in Vancouver to the single thread connecting the flesh club. Thick lines leading to the ocean...red threads circling and twisting among themselves in the waters off the shores of Vancouver Island. A thousand threads intertwining in refreshing seas and silence. A revelation, a clue. A fact I pray unhidden to the eyes of The Great Judge.

Over time the movement differs: In time of solace and solitude a length of thread reaches off shore to inhabit, alone, a green island in Maine; a significant string in another time twists my path into the winding red web of my wife’s own passage.

Today my red thread occupies the halls of a single house in Southern Ohio again. From around the world the trailing thread reaches back home. Viewed today the web reveals a different kind of movement than that of my youth. The thread tangles within the walls of this house, rarely venturing out...traveling to the other side of the earth, when it does, where the thread takes up residence for a month or so moving about foreign streets (I am a journalist who works over seas). It is a new kind of movement. In Ohio the thread follows me a block away in a thick red carpet to the front steps of my daughter’s school where I walk five mornings a week. These days it is her thread weaving
through the neighbor’s yard, not mine (at least not as often as hers). Her thread
doesn’t show a thick line to a church door... but a thick line to the hospital.
Every movement, every encounter, every alley ever walked down, restaurant
eaten at, building explored, river navigated all viewed as a pattern speaking
volumes. Not a single step taken without record.

A simple thing to imagine, but terrifying to imagine it is true. To think we leave
behind so many clues simply by movement. A record of what we take interest
in...and what keeps our interest. Or maybe a record of where life forces us,
coerces us. The red thread of our desire...Or our damnation chalk-marking the
passage of our hours...taking note for some future day of our tale’s unfolding
when our life itself will judge us for our deeds. Some say it will be at feet of a
Great White Throne in the Ever After, but I fear it is now...being played out in
the affection of my manners...in my action and attention, or inattention. I fear
the path and pattern are in plain view with the expression of each value and
decision in the action of my movements. Do I move closer to you here on the
sofa tonight or farther away? I must beware, whether I like it or not it’s gonna
leave a mark. I must be thoughtful where I let my feet take me.
Portsmouth

(A Poem for Blake)
As I walk down the dilapidated street,
Near where the former pristine, now defiled, Ohio does flow,
It shows in the eyes of those I meet,
Eyes of pain, eyes of sorrow.

In every wail of every kind,
It's every teen's greatest fear,
In every voice, in every mind
The thought "I'll never get out of here."

How the lonely derelicts cry,
The empty husks of buildings appall;
The reluctant student does sigh
As he gazes at the flood wall.

And at night as I drive the streets I hear
How the 9th and Waller whores do swear
Blasts the bastard children's tear,
But in our apathy we do not care.
"UNTITLED"

NEIL BAKER

GRAPHITE ON PAPER
"SIZE 12"

LAURA BETH POTTINGER

WATERCOLOR
Regional Differences

Robert Forrey

It wasn't just that he couldn't tell which way the wind was blowing unless he had his finger in the air. It was much more than that, much more than how clouds went scudding for cover once the music of the spheres stopped, like shy girls at a dance who are seen to be waltzing with each other when the lights go up and run giggling for the ladies' room. The drama of the skies in such a climate is certainly worth everybody's price of admission.

All that emptiness in the West is what makes coyotes howl and housewives leave the laundry out on the line all winter. You only have to see one pair of frozen long johns in Oklahoma to understand what drives the Irish and Indians to drink.

America's moment of truth, however, is the Midwest, the location of which no one can agree on but everyone knows it's there somewhere in the hardscrabble soul of it all, the rusting of implements, the dogma of destiny, the burden of God – the bull's eye at the blind heart of being.
"MR. DECENCY"  CHARLES HASKINS

ACRYLIC
The chilling man from your dreams is here... he is walking - stalking - down the street towards your house.

How could that be him?
He isn't real.
Heart beating... faster ...

But then he looks at you and you see his eyes. They are shouting an awful song... come out - come out and play ... but you run to your room and lock the door.

The long black coat haunts your mind... his face is horrible, yet it draws you near.
“WHAT THE HELL”  

MEGAN ANGEL  

DIGITAL
Women I Have Known In The Biblical Sense
Richard Wolfson

Bathsheba,
You sultry bitch,
I sent your husband off to war
So you'd be mine.
Is that a crime?
Deli al ah,
You conniving witch,
If you have waited one year more.
I'm balding; it just takes time.
And Eve,
Standing there without a stitch.
What do you have up
Your naked sleeve?
“SERENDIPITY”  GEORGE BLANTON

CERAMIC TILE
Painting  Walter Iriarte

Welcome, please do come in, make yourself comfortable.
I have been waiting for you since yesterday
And I am very glad to see thee again.
My I partake in thy life once again?
Look at you, thou art more beautiful than the day before.
Thy brown hair flows from thy head, around thy shoulders
Caressing every bit of goodness to the tip of its roots.
Thine eyes amazingly sculpted like some art,
Its colors can replace the moon and make its own stars.
These soft red lips, can heal me in devouration.
Why is it that happiness can't exist without pain?
Must my heart become the shape of thy face
So that I may live peacefully?
Even your stillness shakes my earth and sky,
Elegance and beauty are but one in thy pose.
You say so much by the twinkle of your smile.
Your body is a hidden temple,
That is filled with celestial riches
Which is nothing less than the word perfect.
Those honest hands radiate the strength of thy love
In its complexion, lies the great gentleness of thy personality.
But what drove me mad were not these aspects
But the pure goodness of a woman precipitated by thy heart.
Its abundance fills the world with weakness
That makes us falls down on our knees and cry to ask for mercy.
I am not worthy of your caring voice
Telling me that I am needed.
Why is that, when you have the world at your fingertips?
You have everything your need, peace is thy pillow and love is thy bed.
You could have any man in any life
Or are you not comforted by this footstool?
I don’t know why they call me crazy.
If they see what I see, they would know how I feel.
This illusion has become my reality of you.
In here, I have the presentiment of being here.
In here, I have no problems, no lies, no tears.
In here, I have no other place to live.
Come, raise your glasses in honor,
And admire beauty’s mirror image
The voices outside restrain my feelings,
It's why I cannot reach out and touch thy hand.
I tell them the moon is incomplete,
If the sun ceases to shine.
I tell them the stars will die,
If no one will look upon them.
I say, everything escapes through the path of the beyond.
What you cannot comprehend, you cannot intend.
Out of me, is a world with no rivers, no skies, no mountains, no entrance.
Out of me, is the world's unfortunate naturity.
You are the verse in my song,
You are the joy in my happiness,
You are the reason for reason, and why I'm alive,
My late nights have paid off my distillness,
Leaving footprints that lead to hope.
I will forever unforget you,
I will forever unmeet you,
My eyes hope to see you in the darkness,
After they carry me across this hall.
I am what I was because of you.
Framed upon the wall,
Living is now easiest.
i can't do it i can't stand it not wanting to be of
this planet pacing gracing racing facing past that come
to me replacing everything that it is and no longer held
From heads above the times i cried and tried complied
in direct line to my unholy life and someone somewhere
homes the foam of ocean blood below the tone of
the whales impaled who trailed and failed that gailed
with the beauties of Hellina basket a casket of
the passed it down the streams that careened past the
mountains they blasted through places and races and
leaving no trace of the things that belong in their
improper castings of codes that broken to boast
of the goals that are one with the gun but are only
to toast to the dead that have sped through their
heads at incredible rates of the people's own minds
that have fled due to cloning their phobias from
no one alone is the reason believed i'm best off
on my own.
Cigarette

N.A. Vankirk

You choose me out of the bunch to
Be your lucky one
Light me up
Strike it one
Two three times
Burning for you yearning for you to inhale
Living thriving for it showing you could
Like it so much.
The feeling of never wanting to put me down
You love my taste I love your lips
The instantaneous rush of me inside you is gone
As quickly as I came how just
Habitually puffing not for a thrill
Just to finish me off
Burn me down further further even further still
Until all that’s left is the filter
Snuff me out and toss me onto the filth –
Covered ground Reach in and grab another from
the pack.
“UNTITLED”  NEIL BAKER

CHARCOAL GRAPHITE
"YU YAKE" (SUNSET)  
MASAKAZU KOGANEI

PHOTOGRAPH
"THE CONFUSING PROCESS OF CHARLES HASKINS"

CHARLES HASKINS

ACRYLIC
"LAW. OBEY. CONFORM."

JARED RAINES

PHOTOSHOP
"FIRST NUDE STUDY"

KERI SAGRAVES

OIL ON CANVAS

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2003/iss1/1
"BIKERS FOR CHRIST"  
AARON BENNET

PHOTOSHOP
Old, Older

Darren Baker

Around the front of my van,
not knowing.
I knew,
you didn’t see me.

Crosswalk,
campus green,
State and that other one way.
Scene of the crime.

Reflection,
looked in bookstore windows
purse clutched under arm.
You have red hair again.

Bearded,
hat shielding eyes,
not recognizable,
except for the rolled cigarette.

Five seconds,
you changed,
I am
an old lover.
Star light, Star bright

Ashley Brewer

Back and forth, rocking, unsteadily teetering on the shortest fuse.
Crackling skyrockets and burned-out shooting stars
when wishes are tossed to the bottom of a well—
dark, wet, slimy, and decayed.
Empty quarters are regurgitated up the long chute and broken feelings and hearts are purchased by those we hold oh so dear.
Spiraling to the Great Below are shavings of the most important nobody in the entire existence.
Mold them together with what binds the skin and bones of heroes—
candle wax.
But don’t stand too close to the flame or you will melt, and all that will exist of you is all that I have left—
crackling skyrockets and burned-out shooting stars.
All that was once invincible is now imprisoned in a sorry excuse for a cage—
My heart.
The following words were greatly inspired by a wide-eyed lunatic who left this world in 1947, before the dawning.

Rabbit’s Hole

Rabbit........And in this darkness I hoped to find myself, but what I found was more complete, completely alive. Finding only a red robe discarded I imagined by some operative of the passions I wrapped my tired and dying body in its velvet folds. So warm! The fire of life was kept alive in this place. I found I was brought here, to the beginning for one purpose, to forgive and in the process be forgiven. In the end I was left wanting more. I had found only one rabbit in its hole...It’s Symbolic of Course.
Perplex Ecstasy

Laying naked in Heaven
The palm of hand cupping
Her fingers kissing her skin.
Her hand rubbing her neck, then
Journeying between her breasts.
Caressing them with intimacy.
Hand spreading across her stomach
Palm to skin.
Grasping her hips, the experience intensifies.
Her hand venturing the curves of her voluptuous
thighs.
Stroking as if she were striking a constant key.
With her palm to lips,
A holy palmer’s kiss.
“JELLYFISH” AMBRA KNOCHE

GRAPHIC
"GRANDPA'S VIEW" LAURA BETH POTTINGER

PENCIL WITH NEGATIVE EFFECT
"UNTITLED"

RODNEY MCKINLEY

PHOTOGRAPH
An Elegy for Lost Opportunities
Robert Forrey

Delirious season of joy and sorrow, mixing up everything we ever felt for each other. Apologies are in order, but I will postpone those until I can get a grip on my emotions. Successive enlightenments have left me feeling foolishly endowed with reason and hopes, but the end of the story is a comforting sadness. Everything boils down to aloneness and planting the tree other generations will find some solace in the shadings of. Fulfillment is reserved for those angels of desire who populate those places we were planning to visit but never quite got to, those places I am pointing to but cannot see.
"IN THE MOOD SERIES... DRAMATIC LIGHT"

DEBRA WADE

OIL ON CANVAS
“UNTITLED”

ASHLEY BILYEU

PHOTOGRAPH
"SUNGIRL"  TERRY ALLEN

PHOTOGRAPH
The shiny, silver, Mercedes 300 SL limped grudgingly into the dirt parking lot of the dilapidated country store. Since hitting a pothole the size of a Volkswagen, the driver-side front wheel wobbled back and forth, with a loud screech. Paul Olsson, a stockbroker from New York City, cursed under his breath at his bad luck. First, his boss had told him to go to Atlanta to meet with a bunch of "Good Ol’ Boys" about a major investment opportunity, that the ignorant hicks would probably not understand in the first place. He had been under a great deal of stress at work lately due to the failing economy, and his boss had told him to take his time and drive; that it would relieve the stress. Then he took a wrong turn, got lost, and wound up in the middle of absolutely nowhere, and to top off the adventure, he hit that pothole and from the sound and feel of it, had heavily damaged his new Mercedes.

Now here he was, dressed in an Armani, and new wingtips, an eighty-dollar haircut, and clutching a lukewarm Evian, standing in front of an ages-old, not-painted-in-years, rundown two-story country store, which advertised Barq’s Root Beer on a sign that declared this to be Lafe Stimple’s General Merchandise. An old man sat on a milk crate whittling a piece of wood. He was wearing bibbed overalls, a gray work shirt, and a hat that advertised CAT; he supposed an abbreviation of Caterpillar heavy equipment. That stock had done well in the last quarter, but was suffering now due to massive layoffs, Kubota imports, and high warehouse inventories. The old man had a huge cud of a brown substance Paul thought to be tobacco in his nearly toothless mouth and was chewing away contentedly, occasionally spitting into a Maxwell House coffee can at his feet, the dark juice mixing with the shavings from the wood he was carving distractedly into some sort of object. "Probably making his own tools," Paul thought and chuckled to himself. His work boots looked as though they had never been polished, or even cleaned for that matter, and the shirt was sweat-stained and had a couple of gaping holes that revealed an equally stained tee shirt beneath. The man’s face was tanned leather and a two-day growth of gray whiskers protruded from his chin. The lines in his face reminded Paul of a topographical map he had seen when considering investment in a resort area in the Catskills. The old man eyed him curiously from under the bill of his ball cap, spat with amazing accuracy into the coffee can, and spoke in a southern drawl, "Howdy stranger. Car trouble?"

Paul nodded in the affirmative and stepped up onto the porch, out of the hot noonday sun. A drop of sweat trickled down the side of his nose. God, he hated
to perspire. He thought about retreating to the comfort of the climate-controlled interior of the Mercedes, but knew he had to get help to escape from this "Deliverance" nightmare.

He tried the rusted screen door on the front of the ancient store, and then noticed the Yale padlock barring entrance. "Yale Locks too, had been downsizing lately," Paul thought distractedly. "At what time does this establishment open?" Paul asked. "Around four-thirty in the morning," the old man replied. "Lafe went over to the house for lunch and then he had to go to the doctor in Inez. Been having some regularity problems." "That's a little more information than I need," Paul thought. "Is there a pay phone nearby?" he asked. "Nope," the man replied, "but Lafe will let you use his'n when he gits back. Might as well pull up a crate and sit a spell." "What time will he return?" Paul asked. "Depends on how many walk-ins old Doc Evert has today. Could be an hour; could be three or four. Like I said 'fore, pull up a crate and take a load off." With no other option, Paul took a crate from the stack in front of the grimy window, dusted it off and sat down a safe distance from the spittle of the old man. "Name's Hurled," the old man said. He wiped the blade of the Case Double X knife on his greasy overalls, carefully folded the blade, placed it in the pouch on the front his garment, and offered a calloused dirty hand with yellowed, filth-encrusted, jagged nails. Paul grudgingly took the proffered hand and shook. The old man's grip was iron on his delicate, manicured, pale hand. "Paul Olsson, NYSE," he offered. "That's a right queer name, Inwyessee. Foreigner, are ye?" the old man queried. "No." Paul said, "That is an abbreviation for the New York Stock Exchange." "Stock? Horses, cows, or hogs?" asked Harold. "None of the above, though I do dabble in commodities from time to time," was the reply. "Commodities? They used to send commodities down here, the government did. I liked the cheese and the peanut butter. Didn't care much for the hardtack though. It was a might sweet and went stale purty quick. I'd ruther have Zesta saltines. " Paul suppressed a smile. "Not that type of commodities," he said, "though they do come into the picture." He found the old man's ignorance to be as amusing as the old man found Paul's to be.

"Where ye headed?" Harold inquired. "Atlanta, Georgia," Paul replied offhandedly. "Well, you're Hell and gone from Atlanta," The old man grinned toothlessly. "Yo're in the heart of coal country right now. Musta' got off the trail over on the interstate in West by God Virginia."

"Yes, I must have made a wrong turn."

" Took more than one wrong turn to git ya' here."

"Yes, one would suppose."

"You city folk sure got a funny way of pallaverin'. Had a brother-'n-law went to Atlanta once. Got tangled up with one of them painted-up wimmen, and
tuck to the bottle. Never was much account for puttin’ up hay or coal mining after that. They put him on relief an’ he drowneded over in the Big Sandy a skin-ny-dippin with one of them Pridemore girls from over on Gnat’s crick three year ago.”

"I’m sorry for your loss," Paul could barely contain himself.

"’Tweren’t no loss. Like I said, he wasn’t much account fer coal-mining or puttin’ up hay."

"Where could I get a cold drink? My Evian is tepid."

"Well, the soda machine’s been broke down for a while. It’ll steal yo’re quarters, but they’s a well around the back has water cold as my first wife’s heart, but a whole might sweeter. You’ll have to draw yo’re own though. They’s a dipper a hangin’ on the side, if’ n yer of a mind fer it."

"I think I’ll pass."

"Suit yerself."

"Is there a garage nearby that could make repairs?"

"Naw, they’s some shade tree mechanics around these parts but the nearest real mechanic is over in Louisy. Nigh on to twenty-five mile from here. That there’s a Ford dealership, but I don’t know, as they’d be able to fix a fancy car like the one yer a drivin’. Up in Ashland there’s a foreign car dealer might be able to help ya’. That’s forty-five or fifty mile from here."

"Thanks."

"Welcome. Most of you city fellers are rude and impolite. Yo’re cut from a different cloth. I talked to a feller from Chicago one time and he had mouth fouler than week-old hogswaddle on him. Ain’t no way he ever went to no Sunday meetin’s. I hung up the phone on him quicker’n a fox getting’ out of a henhouse."

"I’m quite sure."

"Ye’ go to the meetin’s?"

"I do venture into the house of worship."

"Baptist?"

"No, Episcopalian."

"Don’t reckon I ever met a Episcopalian before. We’re all Baptists around these parts. Mostly anyways. They’s some Jehovah’s Witnesses ‘round here, and I heared they was a Catholic fella moved into Louisy a while back. I’s told he wouldn’t eat bacon come a Friday. He-He. Bacon tastes just as good on a Friday as it does on a Monday to me. They said he eats fish on a Friday. Tell me young feller, you ever been fishin’?"

"I went on an expedition once. Deep sea fishing for marlins."

"Never et marlin. Mostly catfish; Bluegills, trout, and every once in a while some bass. I favor the catfish though so long as they ain’t too big.... Any bigger than a couple of pounds and they start to gettin’ mushy. The wife, Edna May,
makes a purty mean tuna salad now and again."
"I’m sure she does."
"Used to get a craving for sardines in mustard sauce. Lafe carried them in tins
for me. They give me gas now though."
"How repugnant a thought," Paul pondered silently.
"The fishing ain’t been much account since they started the strip mining. A gov-
ernment feller come down here and told us not to eat any of the fish ‘cause of
the chemicals in the water. Not s’posed to drink the water, eat the fish, nor
swim in the cricks anymore. Now ain’t that somethin’? I grew up eatin’ the fish,
swimmin’ in the cricks, and drawin’ water out of the wells in these parts, and
now they say it ain’t safe. What’s this world comin’ to?"
"Well, environmental damage is one of the byproducts of a sound economy."
"I reckon. Sure makes it a might intolerable though. I recall that afore the strip
minin’ started they was all deep mines. The coal companies said that strip minin’
was safer fer the workers. They didn’t say it would mess up the water and such.
They weren’t as much money in the deep mines neither. But people got to a han-
kerin’ fer conditioned air, and automated dishwashers, and satellite television
and the next thing you know they’s more strippers here than a Las Vegas casino.
Not that I’ve ever been to Las Vegas. Don’t rightly even know where it is. Well,
they got their conditioned air and all that frilly nilly nonsense, but now you can’t
eat out of the cricks, nor drink water out of their own wells they dug. Kinda’
makes ya’ wonder who come out on the top of the heap. All I know is I sure did-
’t. When I was a young’un if ye got hot you’d go out an’ jump in the crick. If
ye got cold, ya’ throw another faggot on the fire. Women worshed the dishes by
hand, and they didn’t cook in them microwave ovens either. You ever smelt
fresh-baked bread right out of the oven?"
"No, I can’t say that I have."
"Well ya’ should. Hit’s sweeter than honeysuckle. Makes the whole house smell
good all day. Get ya’ a chunk of butter fresh from the churn, and some home-
made sorghum and ye’ can’t get any closer to heaven if ye’ prayed ever’ day of
yer life. ""We have fresh-baked goods at a pastry shop around the corner from
Wall Street, but I have never really noticed the aroma. They have really good
pies and cakes though.""Well now, if ye wanna talk about pies, now that is a
whole diff’rent story. Blackberry’s my favorite. Edna May likes cobbler and
blackberry dumplin’s better though. Ye ever go a berry pickin’?"
No, not ever."
"Well now that’s a job, but the rewards is sweet. When ye go blackberry pickin’
yer likely to git a scratched up a might from the briars. Used to see bear tracks,
but I ain’t seen none in a spell. If ye have a good spell of rain in the spring
"they’ll be as big as yer thumb and sweet as Karo syrup, but with a dry spring they’re smaller and a might tart. Don’t have to worry ‘bout snakes too much with blackberries, ‘ceptin’ the ‘ccassional copperhead. I always carried a big stick with me just in case. Now my brother Neil used to catch’em, kille’m, skin’um, and tan and sell the hides. I’d just catch’em on the end of the stick and pitch’em as far as I could. No sense in killin’ something ye can’t eat. Right around the first of August, we’d get all clothed up and go to a pickin’. They was a time I could get twenty-five or thirty gallon a year off the hill behind the house. That strip minin’ washed out most the good patches though. I’m lucky to get five gallon a year now.

Young’uns around here used to make money enough fer new shoes and long britches fer school just from berry pickin’. If they went a ginsengin’ they might even get a new coat fer cold weather. Now all they wanna do is play them video games and watch MTV. I never seen the beat. Peanut Borders’ children won’t even go out and help hoe the corn anymore. Hear tell his wife got her one of them home computers and internet, met some feller on there and run off with him. Didn’t even file papers fer a divorce. Well, that bein’ as it may, berry pickin’ used to be a right smart way of a makin’ money in the summer. Now huckleberry pickin’ is a might diff’rent than blackberry pickin’. Them timber rattlers will lay up in huckleberry patch nigh often as not. They hide in there and wait for the birds to light and eat. They reach up and grab them birds slicker’n a tin whistle. Now I’ll kill a rattler on account of they’re good eatin’. I like mine fried up with white morels that I pick around the middle of April and a mess of cornbread and brown beans. A meal fit for a king I tell ye’. They’s a lot of greenbriar around them huckleberry bushes though and likely as not ye’ll get yer hands scratched up a might, but it’s mighty fine eatin’. “I wonder what time it is,” Paul thought glancing down at his Rolex. Twelve forty-five. Would this day ever end? Interesting to hear the old man talk though, backwoods as he was. Paul felt himself relaxing, as he had not in years.

"Lafe used to have a mighty purty strawberry patch back behind the store, but since he’s been getting’ on in years it’s all gone to weed. I like strawberries fresh or in preserves, but I don’t care too much for the pies." "I like the strawberry gelatos I get at Central park in the summer." "Gelato? Frozen Jell-O?" "No, Italian ice cream." "Hand-cranked?" “I don’t believe so.” "Hand –cranked ice cream is the best. When I was a young’un, mother ordered an ice cream crank out of the Sears and Roebuck catalog. Us kids couldn’t wait to taste the doin’s from it. We’d take the heavy cream from churning, pour in
some store bought sugar, add berries or fruit, and stand and crank a spell. That's the best ice cream money can't buy. Ye' had to work for it pickin' the berries or fruit, sellin' off some of it for store bought sugar, ice and salt. We didn't have your refrigerators. We had an icebox, and ye bought ice from the ice man. I don't recollect where he got that ice in the summertime, but he always seemed to have it. Anyways, it didn't cost a lot, but you had to work for it and that made it so much sweeter than this store bought ice cream they got now. We'd work our tails off a hoein' corn and pickin' beans, 'cause when the beans was in we'd have an ice cream day. Almost as good as Christmas, I'd say. When we got the summer corn in we'd have another ice cream day. Man, now that was livin'. Nowadays folks would say that was too much work for too little return, but we didn't think so. Nosiree Bob. The hard work was well worth every bite."

"It does seem like quite a bit of effort for ice cream. In our neighborhood we had an ice cream truck that would come down the street ringing the bell. Some would get money from their parents and rush out to buy their favorite treat, but I had a paper route and made my own money. It was not the hard work that you described, but it was tedious and time consuming. There were some people who didn't want to pay and I had to spend countless Saturday mornings knocking on doors in order to collect. I recall there was one couple that was especially hard to collect from. I would hide in the bushes along their walk and when they emerged for an outing I would swoop down on them and demand payment. They always paid, but always late."

"Well, there isn't much in the way of credit around here anymore. Used to be a man's word was enough for folks. That's because back then a man was only considered as good as his word. If a man went back on his word, he was considered no good and no one'd have anything to do with him. Not unless he went to church and got saved and took to the good book. I remember my granddaddy once owed Lafe thirty-five cents and told him he would pay him back on the twelfth of December. Well, the twelfth rolled around and we had thirty-four inches of snow on the ground. Grandpa didn't have a car and even if he had, wouldn't've done him much good in that weather and with these roads. Grandpa put on his overcoat and galoshes, got thirty-five cents out of the cookie jar, and put a hot potato out of the fire in his pocket and took off a walkin'.

"A potato?"

"Yessiree! A hot potato out of the fire would keep your hands warm fer quite a spell a walkin' in the snow. Then if ye got hungry, ye had a meal to eat too." When we went to school in the winter, every young'un in the school would have a hot potato in their pocket fer lunch and to keep their hands warm. We'd carry a cold potato in our other pocket and put it in the stove a couple of hours before school would let out so's we could keep our hands warm on the way home and
have supper dang near ready for us when we got home."

"Quite ingenious!"

"Well we made do with what we had. Anyways, Grandpa took off a trudging through the snow twelve miles to Lafe’s store here, and handed Lafe that thirty-five cents. Lafe told him that he could have waited until the snow melted off, but grandpa said ‘I’m a man of my word and you can chisel it in stone.’ They’s still a few folks in these parts will do business on a handshake, but they are few and far between now. Everything has to be in writing and on paper. Why, it’s a wonder folks get anything done at all, what with all that writing and a figuring and carryin’ on. I went over to the First National bank to borrow on my farm one time. I was down in the back and wanted to buy me a tractor to do the farm work with. Well now, that feller from the bank handed me a stack of papers thicker’n The Holy Bible and it had words it’d take three horse traders and a travelin’ preacher to pernounce wrote all over it. Well, Sir I used some of it fer terlet paper, and some of it to start a fire in the wood stove, and put about ten pages of it in a crack in the kitchen floor. That’s about all I figured it was worth."

Harold reached two grimy fingers to his mouth and pulled the cud from his mouth. He dropped it and it fell with a thud into the coffee can, splattering spittle and tobacco juice out of the can and onto the bare boards of the porch. He absentmindedly rubbed the fluid into the wood with his boot, while he fished a new wad from a pouch he carried in his right hand shirt pocket. He eyed the wad carefully and pushed it into his mouth with his coarse right thumb. He surveyed the thumb for a moment as if it were a new appendage he had grown out of nowhere. " Came dang near to a losin’ that thumb ‘bout thirty year ago." He said, "Really?" queried Olsson. "Yep, I was a ……" Harold’s voice tapered off as an orange 1960’s model Chevy pickup careened around the curve in the road, bouncing back and forth on oversized tires. A rebel flag covered the rear window, nearly obscuring the gun rack, one cradle holding a high-powered rifle and the other a fishing rod. The two occupants were young, longhaired and unkempt. "Some of that Martin county bunch," Harold remarked and spat into the coffee can. "Them boys is ornery as cat squat and crooked as the Levisa fork of the Sandy. Best if’n ye don’t say nuthin’. They don’t cotton to city fellers and they’s a whole lot of mean in them boys. Runs in their fam’ly. Been that way since prohibition. Shiners, most of’em were."

Dust flew in great clouds from the tires as they slid into the lot. One of the men, with a missing front tooth and a "Bocephus" shirt tee shirt called out the window, "Is Lafe open? We’re a needin’ some gas." "Naw," Harold retorted. "He’s over to Inez at the Doc’s. Orta be back in a couple of hours." "Who’s the city feller?” the other called out the window. "He’s m’nephew.
Come down fer a visit, so’s ye just keep yer flytrap off’n him,” Harold rebutted. He winked at Paul, and pulled the knife out of his pocket. He unfolded it and picked up the piece of wood he had been whittling. Tires spun and dust flew again as the two rebellious youths careened out of the lot with a loud rumble emitting from the exhaustless pickup.

“TEMPESTUOUS”  
JON BENJAMIN

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