

The Best Show In Town

Daddy has a hayseed in his mouth and has on overalls and a straw hat. The smell of rich earth fills the Hall.

“Did’ja know I’m a farmer? Yep. In a way we’re all farmers, some more than others. I’ve spent my whole life watchin’ things grow—startin’ ’em up from seed, keepin’ what’s good, the old and the new. But somewhere along the way you might have to prune it or cut it back, as well as feed it and love it. It’s a lot like havin’ babies, isn’t it? Forget the pain, most mothers do. If you want that babe to grow up straight ’n strong, then you gotta plant seeds and tend to ’em. And be patient.

“A young fresh mind is a lot like a farmer’s virgin soil. Both allow the seeds sown in them to grow verdantly and bear luxuriantly. But the mind requires the greater care. And if you plan to use it to educate and train yourself, then you gotta do it before your mind loses its freshness and becomes hard to penetrate.

“That’s where dreaming comes in. Dreaming restores the freshness that is vital to maintaining the fertile soil of the mind. But beware: Ideas planted into the fertile soil of the mind take longer than all others to bear fruit—except, of course, with the use of my Maquette.”

Everyone imagines being in a favorite setting sowing the seeds of delight. Georgia is already elbow-deep in the rich soil of her child-

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hood garden.

Daddy is pacing the floor expectantly. “Even though we can’t speed up the birthing process of human babies, with dreaming we can overcome many everyday obstacles for faster births. I’m not saying you’ll never need to take remedial action to get things back on track. Nope. But with dreaming, I’ve seen more hard-fought battles produce sweet fruit. And keep in mind that before it’s ripe and sweet that same fruit will taste bitter. So we learn to wait.”

Daddy looks around the room for understanding faces...and our eyes finally meet! His eyes widen some more as he waves up the house lights.

“Excuse me, friend. I see we have a special guest with us tonight. Please welcome my daughter Sarah. Honey, will you stand up?”

A twitch rankles Daddy’s shoulder as he shifts beneath an invisible weight. That look on his face is back. What does it mean?

“Honey, you ’n me got a date tonight after the show, right?”

“Of course, Daddy.”

Giggles sprout from the audience.

Daddy has a bite of cake and stares at his notes awhile longer.

“Friend, I created my Maquette as a toy for my daughter when she was just knee-high. And because of it, I believe, she is a great architect today. At the age of only six my Sarah was already working on her goals through dreaming, and she was one serious student. If bedtime came late she’d protest ‘Do I have to stay up?’ And that often escalated to ‘You can’t do that to a child!’ You see, even at that tender age she knew that once the spirit is free of its physical bonds, the seeds you plant into the fertile soil of dreaming *must* grow. These seeds can be a poem or essay or short story before going to sleep, cutting out paper dolls or studying the stars. For that matter, any constructive object you focus on before falling asleep will work. I like to think of it as the practice of image continuation. But my daughter summed it up pretty well at the age of twelve when she

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called it ‘the smarts to use the hours we sleep to exercise the spirit of dreaming.’”

Daddy rearranges the top of the Maquette.

“When I was young my dad taught me that God put us here to help one another. What on earth the others were here for, he never did understand. And he lived his life believing that we’re mostly alike. Some are farmers and some are laborers, the rest something else. ‘Just allow for a few differences,’ he’d say.

“But around the time I turned eight I started thinking that I really wasn’t like the other boys. Lying on my bed with my arms folded behind my head, I’d daydream for hours and indulge myself in an endless stream of wondrous ideas and imaginary friends and special places. By the time I turned nine I knew the other boys didn’t have imaginary friends anymore, and I began to worry if it was normal. But I didn’t wait long for an answer because even stranger things started happening. Full-blooded apparitions and monsters in the flesh, fantasies of my own making started coming to my room. Some lived only by day and others only at night, and it got so I could recognize them by the sound of their footsteps even before they got to my door. Soon I was spending so much time playing with them that I started to worry my dad would find out and take them away from me. So after some serious cogitating on the subject, I concluded that I needed to put them where no one would find them.

“Do you know where that was? I put them where every nine year old thinks no one will ever look. That’s right. I began stuffing them in my closet. And no matter how many new ones showed up, it never got full!

“I tried so hard not to play with them at first. But then I’d leave the door open a crack to hear them, or invite one out to play. Of course it wasn’t long before my room was crowded all the time again—and again I got scared my dad would find out. That’s when I

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started having thoughts of civil war and seceding from the family. I knew something had to be done. Something *drastic*. But what?

“That’s when it happened. Right there in that one-story farmhouse, in a flat field in the flattest flatlands of Buxton County, my bedroom became ‘my tower.’

“High above the trees and far away from those we live with, all boys live in towers. Some are big and some are small, some are short or tall or not at all where others can find them. Now, you may be thinking it wasn’t real because no one else could see it—and that’s the kind of thinking we’re working to rid ourselves of tonight! Truth is, it was real simply because I believed it was. And in case you haven’t noticed, you’re in my tower right now.

“Why do we build towers? Anyone? ... That’s right. Building your own tower is a lifelong pursuit to help you find your way. Someone else? ... Because a tower is a personal landmark you can see from life’s highway. Good. It can also provide a panoramic view to help you see where you’re going, right? And show you where you’ve been. You ... Did you all hear that? Some people make memories at a prodigious rate, growing room upon room to house them. The higher they build, the farther they can see. Good. Here’s another: Some build to rarefied heights to satisfy their need to feel godlike and look down on the world they create. You get the point.

“But discovering your tower and its hidden treasures isn’t a stroll in the park. Far from it. Only a few will hear the murmurings of their heart. Still fewer will stay the course and refuse to be misled by the many who pass through their lives and try to stun and deceive them with lies.”

All eyes are trained on the synchophonic decoy created by the Maquette.

“It’s true that there are mostly good ideas here, but that depends on how you use them. Choosing a good idea won’t guarantee that you’ll end up on the high road to a happy ending. Even those des-

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tined for hallowed ground may be tempted to take a shortcut and into harm's way. And it won't work to use someone else's lantern if it won't light all the dark corners.

"Even if we follow all the signposts, we can end up making a mistake and having to do the job over again. It takes about the same amount of energy to do something right the first time as it does to do it wrong. So for those of you that speed through what you do, answer me this. How much faster will you get there and at what cost if you have to do it over again? That's right. We never replace the time we waste."

"A galloping horse scatters dirt!"

"Uhh...right. Thank you Shems."

Daddy enjoys a bite of cake and rearranges the top of the Maquette.

"I'd like to share a dream I had almost forty-five years ago that's as clear to me today as if it happened last night. I credit that dream with helping me chart my course in life.

"In my dream I'm walking toward a giant white file cabinet. Growing older and older with each step, long white hair is cascading down my shoulders. Even at a distance I can read the names on files in the open drawer. Then mine rises up and opens toward me. I want to read what's inside it, but I can't seem to get close enough. I'm still struggling to reach it when I wake up, panting and breathless.

"That same dream occurred maybe four or five times over the course of a year. But the next time was different. I awoke from it gasping for air like a newborn baby. Then a creeping awareness: the file cabinet was in my room at the foot of the bed! I reached inside for my file and read..."

Everyone is reading from their file.

"And to my surprise I found that all the events and actions of my life were put into categories—'The Past,' 'The Present' and 'The Perhaps'—with all the good and bad plainly there for me to see. First I read The Past, which seemed true enough but didn't take very long.

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Then I read *The Present*, which was even shorter. But before I could finish, the drawer started to close and the file began slipping from my hands. Now reading as fast as I can into my future, looking for promises still to be lived, I read: ‘He ate. He saw. He loved. He dreamed—’ But it was too late—the file slipped from my fingers and back into the drawer. And as it was closing, I noticed that some of the other files with unfamiliar names were thicker than mine, and I began to wonder why. Did they accomplish more in their lifetime? Or did they just live longer? Then the file cabinet disappeared and the room filled with light.

“That dream haunted my waking thoughts for days. And I began to wonder who and what I would become. Wasn’t it strange that I had never thought about it before? Not about the work I would do or the family I might have? Then the realization struck, sudden and explosive: I didn’t have to live a life written in some file outside time and nature. No, I could change it—*rewrite it!* Because most things worth having require only the time and energy to acquire them!

“Now, I’m sure many of you are telling yourselves right now that you couldn’t possibly find any extra time in your busy schedule. Well, I’m gonna let you in on a little secret. Listen carefully because it could change your life. It’s time you started thinking of yourself as a *time machine*.”

Daddy waits for the rumble to subside.

“Haven’t we all been transported back in time by a familiar taste or smell, a few bars of an old song or something soft and comforting? As far back as early childhood if the conditions are right.

“So, what if I told you that you could choose your own destiny and reinvent yourself at will—create a whole new life for yourself without harming another soul? That would be a whole new game, wouldn’t it?

“Who can count to twenty-five thousand? Let’s have a show of hands. It’s easy, isn’t it? Now divide that by three hundred sixty-five. I’ll save you the trouble, it’s about seventy. What’s my point? That’s

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the number of productive years the average adult will live. How long do you wanta live?” He looks around the room and points, “Sam?”

“95!”

“Claire?”

“99.”

“Over there.”

“110?”

“And what if you don’t? Let’s think about this. It is my belief that the average person harbors a secret desire for immortality—to leave an imprint on this world before his or her time is up. Have I told you that I’m gonna live forever? I know, I know. I’ll share that with you on Sunday. But for the moment try to suspend your disbelief. Because there’s a process of time that controls our perception of time itself, and it waits for everyone to surrender to it. You see, as we grow older a curious phenomenon is taking place in the present and in the future, too. It affects all opportunities that come our way as well as the satisfaction we get from them. It’s the equation each of us writes, and the answer is always the same. Its simplicity will surprise you, so listen carefully.” Daddy takes a deep breath and whispers, “*You get what you ask for in life.*”

Again a rumble.

“I see from the look on your faces that the significance of this statement is lost on some of you. It’s important to understand it before we move on. I’ll sum it up in one word: *Desire*. Surprised? You shouldn’t be. Your ability to get what you want in life is governed first and foremost by knowing exactly what it is you want and what makes you happy, and then using the means at your disposal—the words, ideas and actions—to ask for it. Yep, there are too many people out there embarking on a long journey with a half-full tank.”

A fever of desire is burning in everyone.

“Think back to your lesson on the evolution of ideas. In that lesson you learned that the mind manages its own process of creation.

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Ideas just don't spring full-grown into your head. They must be birthed like other living organisms. We've all seen ideas prematurely thrust into the light and the consequences: some are malnourished or underdeveloped, others stillborn. We've also seen that the mind synthesizes its current activities into ballast for future idea generation. Some ideas are ignored, waiting for that special moment to be born, while others we coax out to play and consciously nourish, or put into general circulation for easy reference. Spanking new ideas are mostly a misnomer, where in fact they're usually imported and must be received on the fertile ground of our interests to root, or be rejected."

Daddy takes another bite of cake.

"Hmh. It's fascinating to discover what the mind is capable of, isn't it? Its almost limitless power. Its ability to adapt and evolve. Someone asked (someone always does, even if it's me), 'Why is it so important then to be selective about the words and images we use if its power is so vast?' That's a good question. And I have a good answer.

"You see, the mind has an auto-pilot function all its own that we call the unconscious, and it works all the time and even overtime just for the fun of it. Notice I said '*unconscious*.' It's one of life's small ironies that so many people still call this obviously superior part of our psyche the '*subconscious*.' So whether you prime it with good ideas or bad ideas, the inertia of your thoughts and the playful character of the mind begin to fill in time, if not actual space and circuitry. And though it's playful, the mind is also strangely powerful. In fact it's one of only two known forces that can bend light. Who can name the other?"

"Gravity!"

"That's right. Gravity is a predictable force that conditions our thinking. But never underestimate the power of the mind. Watch this..."

Daddy demonstrates by passing a shimmering red laser across

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the Hall less than an inch above his scalp. Slowly he rises up on tip-toes, sending a multitude of gasps across the floor...taking his time, looking pensive and devious... But the beam never touches his head and is noticeably bent above him.

“Some of you have asked how you can better know your heart when the knowledge you have isn’t enough to choose the right path. Those who think you know the answer, please keep it to yourself. Because what you may not know is where it comes from.

“The best way to demonstrate this is to remember what it’s like to be a child about to begin an art project. And like all young children, you begin without planning or hesitation.”

Art supplies appear on each desk.

“Open the jars of paste and paint... Smell them, go on. Good, good. Now let’s play. Shuffle the colored paper and clank the scissors...squeeze the clay... Trust your feelings...*first feelings*... Beautiful.

“Continue doing that. Good. The answer is ‘inspiration.’ It’s a combination of spirit and intuition that many describe as a feeling of knowing deep inside. All animals feel it and their survival depends on it. We call that instinct. All people feel it too, but many mistrust it. We call that a hunch.

“What power moves this feeling called inspiration? Can we depend on it? And if so, where will it take us?”

Overhead banners gesticulate in slow motion as ribbons of shimmering color flash in the stream at our feet.

Daddy is standing in the stream wearing a flowing tunic in a pattern of concentric rings in the same silver-blue color as the water. Where his tunic meets the water there is no division of one beginning or the other ending.

“There is a power within us like a rushing cool stream that nourishes and provides all manner of things to each and every one of us.”

Everyone is swimming freely in the stream.

“All energy in nature’s grand tapestry tries to take a physical

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form. When we see a figure in the mist or shadowy form in a tree, those images exist as energies in our mind—and that’s our link to dreaming! Dreams are true windows to the soul that allow us to see the purest expression of our inner self. And by nurturing our dreams and treating them with respect, we can learn to control the vast power inside.”

Energies in the stream are in tireless pursuit of fertile ground.

“Many of you know that I’ve been in love with butterflies my whole life. Remarkable creatures. Butterflies bring pleasure with their beauty and movement. But this fascination goes far beyond their physical beauty and has come to represent the very essence of dreaming to me. For what egg-hatched caterpillar could ever know that a crawler would one day fly and defy gravity? Yet it follows a star within, shedding the confines of its too small skin to grow and prepare for the day when it puts nature to the test and gambles with its life and those of all its descendants.

“Now, you and I both know that a butterfly doesn’t really have a choice and it’s a pretty safe bet it will fly. But too many people have grown unsure of their potential and are losing that bet day after day—even though they’re equipped to *soar!*”

Daddy takes a bite of cake and rearranges the top of the Maquette.

“Every force in nature requires a fuel or else it will consume itself.”

Inside the glass cases, coming into focus, spinning galaxies of color are hard at work turning energy and desire into matter. Daddy’s words are a catalyst that allows everyone to see what he or she longs for most.

“Unique among all fuels is love. Its power is limitless and more enduring than anything else we know. Love can give meaning to your dreams. And by making love grow, you make your dreams grow with it.

“But how to make love grow? One way is to share your hopes and dreams with those you care about. That’s right. Talking about them

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is the same as exercising them. It strengthens their desire to grow. We also know that the love you give is always less than the love you receive—which happens to be sowing and reaping at its finest, so give generously.

“But the same titanic forces that give birth to your dreams can also tear down everything you worked so hard to create...”

The glass cases suddenly darken and turn opaque.

Daddy stops and stares at me—looking through me with that pain in his eyes.

“And when you least expect it, a storm of disbelief will blow across the land. Unless your creations are founded on the bedrock of your beliefs, the beautiful towers and inventions that you thought would stand the test of time will topple like child’s play and send your spirit packing.