

CHAPTER ONE: On Being a Hermit

When I turned forty, I spent four months in complete solitude on the Big Sur coast in California. As wrote then, "forever within the music of river and ocean."

Now in the high desert pines of New Mexico, I wrote a couple of poems this year about slowly entering three years alone.

Set Sail Alone

Solitude un-encrusted with time

Thousand shattered mirrors
each unbloodied shard

Reflecting no other

No self as other

Now fifty-seven

Saturn returns with scythe
nothing to harvest
nobody home
absent one so uninterested

Birth, death, crumbling self

We entertain ourselves thus

Freedom
Incarceration

Dust in the wind

Illness
Healing

Echo of an echo of story
told too many times

Fragrance
Breeze

disease vector is self

no self

no disease

As I settle into being a hermit, I go deep into the Buddhist exercises of developing empathy and compassion

Lojong.

Bless Transience

Bless the transient truth of all things

That moment
bless it
Twenty five years married
thought till death we part

That season
had a reliable set of legs

Bless too that long passage
when predictably continent

Fool thought diapers for babies

May he rest in peace

Bless when thought
live to ripe old age

Homage you fool

Homage!

Fool though he may be
Fool that I am
I also hope
where no hope is found

Tend the fire
for warmth, light, inspiration
Invite you who
suffer cold night

I have a story.

Currently that story is inscribed in this book -- and sharing it has to be PERK NUMERO UNO.

Havent a clue who I will be when walk out of solitude three years from now.
Not a clue.

Will I be alive? This terminal business is for real and though I frolic occasionally over the zany humor of it ... it is dead serious.

Am a hermit because of being terminal.

Want to meet the spirit of death face to face.

In the years of being initiated into becoming a tribal medicine man (a *nganga*) of the Shona and Ndebele Zulu of Zimbabwe, if there are any teachings at all that have become a part of me, they are:

- God is the healer, the activity of healing - not people.
- To make peace is to heal and to heal is to make peace. First make peace with your disease, it is your path to the village of the ancestors.
- Don't for a moment imagine you know what healing is.
- Sometimes a sacred illness is healed in this life, sometimes through the ending of it. It's not yours to choose.
- I am Gods arms
 I am Gods legs
- You are not the author of the story you are living and that is blessed.
- Animals are sacred kin. Those who endanger them are evil.

- Gratitude is the spiritual practice of elders.

One of the big perks of being terminal is to celebrate what you have given.

I do preen in pride (you could call it callow white male boast), that when your average white forty something was literally cashing in (moneywise) on his numinous white maleness, I was cultivating a farm in Zimbabwe so a clan of tribal friends and family could survive a drought and famine, likely caused by climate change.

With that I can die peacefully.

With having a daughter and grandson and two adult granddaughters
With that I can die peaceful.

Refining practices of meditation, prayer and compassion to the measure that God intends before departing.

With that I can pass quietly.

Mr. Hermit arrives:

Mr. Hermit - The only thing worse than boasting is preaching! Cut it the fuck out.

Me - Dont you mean freak out?

Mr. Hermit - Fuck off!

I will enter silence for real when Mr. Potty Mouth Hermit shuts the fuck up.

He barges in.

Mr. Hermit - Or how about you conjuring up a hermit - me truly - alter-ego, to convince you that you've arrived

Pretty sleazy if you ask me .

Me - You know sleaze when you see it, O Thou King of Sleaze.

Mr. Hermit - The one and only.

Me - And yes fuck you very much. This "one and only" BS is what I mean by identity by *fiat*.

Mr. Hermit - This insisting on the last word is how you do *fiat*. Don't say *touché* or you'll die quickly and miserably.

Mr. Hermit SS (short and snooty) - The truth or lack thereof of your precious poems is irrelevant. In my humble opinion, the declarative voice immediately falsifies. It is the voice of the egotist and the cowboy. It is the squeaky voice of your *i* - guy and his puny phallic symbol up on the stage armed with trumpet and song.

The long and short saga of being a terminal hermit is forever in this timeless moment. This timeless moment is the only place healing can happen. It is the heart of God. It is the only place where you can be born, live, and die.

In ancient Egypt it would be said we are in the judgement hall of Ma'at where your soul is weighed against the feather of truth.

Dare I for the moment speak the truth of myself?

Dare I not?

If not now, when?

Mr. Hermit insists on being heard again:

Me - OK, blab away.

Mr. Hermit - That conversation we had before, the three Stooges (me, myself and I) so rudely interrupted us...

Me - You, Mr. Hermit F-word pushy friggin' lonely ass bastard. What conversation?

Hermit - No good for a wannabe hermit to have a mind like a sieve. You brought up e.e.cummings, the Buddha of the lower case. *i waxes cummingsesque*. You italicize lower cases; and sprinkle them the wind.

Me - And your comment?

Mr. Hermit - Brilliant, moron. Freakin' brilliant. What do you have against the dead e.e? The moment you would grab your itsy bitsy *i* and you will walk on stage you'd pull a Sachmo gambit and trumpet "What a Wonderful World" and ain't I the center of it?"

You think you were a terrorist once? You freakin' with e.e.'s grave again, and you're dead meat.

Me - Gotcha. Should I suggest a valium?

Mr. Hermit - Too fucking polite.

I settle into solitude and will emerge when I'm sixty.
This is an order of solitude which I have never known before.

Used to call Multiple Sclerosis The Guest.
Some Guest, my mother would say, seeing its rudeness.

The kid that I was would make this into a romantic tryst, the consummation of the most mysterious intimacy.

Wrote erotic poems to the bride and that she choose me as husband.

Reflect when was in a bookstore in Boulder, Colorado.

Upscale café bookstore.

With first cup, mass peristalsis.

Shit my pants.

The Guest was messing with me again.

The twisted humor of it.

Staggered to the bathroom fragrantly, to wash out my pants and briefs. The morning of my fifty-sixth birthday. A friend in Santa Fe called my cell phone in the middle of my cleanup to wish me happy birthday.

All in all, not a romantic tryst.

Being trained in two

African traditions as a medicine man, I learned that accommodating the spirit that afflicts is the way of healing.

That's why I called the spirit of MS The Guest.

Exactly the opposite of Western allopathic medicine where the *war metaphor* predominates.

Attacking an inflammatory process with powerful pharmaceuticals, as I was, is insane.

A terminal hermit with an advanced "incurable" neuromuscular disease.

The Guest was always feminine - and a skilled instructor in the inner feminine.

Now he has become my roomie and for thee years he will deepen my solitude.

Night will soon fall. *Mi choza de soledad* , my hut of solitude, will soon be wrapped in dark.

Blessed without electricity or running water. Looking up at the mountains of my childhood and my mother's childhood and her wild brood.

A hermit lives by the rhythms of sunrise to sunset and the waxing and waning of the moon.

Hermit's heartbreak

1

Suggesting overcoming
offends love gods

Orpheus overcoming losing Eurydice?

Sometimes heartbreak
is
merely perpetual

May the man that I was rest in peace

Was a good go of it

Heroic since failure was always
inevitable

2

Perpetuity of heartbreak

In China
Kwan Yin's name
"she who hears cries"

No refuge from wail of all living beings

Planet dries up
Her multiple arms
and endless kind gestures
"like changing position
of a pillow
when asleep"

She takes my body
full moon

well prepared

Me - Goodnight Mr. Hermit. Thank you for your humble opinions. I'll be indebted forever.

Mr. Hermit - Fuck your fucking f words. "Forever" my ass. Well fuck you very much, you masochistic punk. Woooooo. WAY TOO polite. You accused me of stamping your identity by *FIAT*. Well you're MR. *FIAT*, jerk off. Enlightenment by *fiat*? Some kind of *gonzo* sudden enlightenment? Way boring. Cultivate a little suffering, it'll do ya good.

Me - I receive your wisdom and kindness.

Mr. Hermit - I'm not kind at all. Wise? You make me want to vomit. Leave the wisdom to the wise guys that pack a piece.

You expect applause for opening your eyes and getting enlightened? You think you are the new kid on the block?

Applause will only make you stupid - or are you just too stupid to get it?