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1

**BREATHE! BREATHE! OH GOD, HOW I WOULD BREATHE!**

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**Breathe! Breathe! Oh God, how I would Breathe!**

*by Perry A. Chapdelaine*

My feet tread gently on wave-imprinted sand, where horizon's pencil-line joins red-water to the tan.

Nostalgic salt spray dashes through briny-weed leaving my security intact.

Turning I see huddled boxy houses, each flush to the ground, none more than two stories high, lined stucco-white, square of door and window, joined to one another in long rows of sentry caverns, broken only by yawning cross-streets.

I walk toward the nearest open street, arms swinging freely, close, warm in my feelings. Beyond the first home, turn left -- teenagers -- waiting for simple artlessness like me, to pass.

Will they tease?

Will I fight?

Must I fight?

Dare I turn now? Surely they will run after me, thinking me a coward.

Breathing deeply, I exhale the last of the blood-red salt-tang. On my face, a pretended smile of friendliness - an 'I'm one of you gang!' look.

I walk toward the tallest who is surrounded by four, t-shirt, blue-jean, bedecked.

Will they strike before talking?

Muscles sheathe-tight to maintain the outward calm, my thoughts buzz inside my hollow gourd, as if to say, 'Here, try this one, or that one -- try them all until you find your way out of *this* one!'

'Hi!' I greet with lying grin.

The tallest smiles!

He asks my name!

They all smile!

Unsung, my protective shield dissipates as though among friends, which I am. I *am* one of these.

Standing, we talk. I laugh, and levels rise with shared experiences, creatively pleased, alone, together.

But the nicest disappears!

Pushing his foot this way and that on hard-packed street dirt, he is with us, then gone. Like sharp lines of light extended from body's every point, my imaged after-view lingers grotesquely.

Does anyone notice?

Oh, if I could breathe now -- Breathe! Breathe! Oh God, how I would breathe!

Ah, relief! I am three people. Behind buffered bakery glass, I see tantalizing twists and shapes of delicious sweets. Hmmm -- joyously satiating, pleasurable fulfilling, how honeyed they taste! *That* one kind of plumish with a tartness touch. *This* one over here an exploding orange.

One of me has turned and I see the other two. One of me has long curls of brown, blue eyes and long pull-over purpled dress. My smile *there* is genuine and teeth so pretty.

The other me has button-down lapels and. . . . Button-down lapels?

Why would anyone want button-down lapels?

Oh abnormality! Someone ought to tell *this* me button-down lapels are unseemly. Old, outdated, not the style.

Do they fear to hurt this me's feelings? With the thought, a shock; the other used-to-be-mes walk away. I stand with the oddity of button-down lapels.

Inside my mind, a delicate, feather sensation, not the bottom buttons of button-down lapels. Nibbling with delicate bits, I struggle, surround it, peer through it, my eyes focus far ahead where can be



seen MR. Button-down lapels walking arm-in-arm with my girl-friend.

I don't mind because Mr. Button-down lapels disappears in vectors of soft, white light. Ha! Ha!  
Oh, I did see it!

Night time is best for flying. Swinging, pressing, pushing hard. I flap my arms to soar; below, silhouetted against city's rhythmical lights: telephone wires, high-powered electrical lines, tall gnarled trees, radio beacons, TV masts, statues of humanity's pride.

Is a law which says, "The harder one flaps, the harder one falls," like self-consuming snakes?

In panic, I struggle while inevitable pollution-loaded wires beckon -- ah! But there's a friendly tree. I dive into arm's-spread life, curling fingers around thick branches to hold tight. Here, in nature's natural womb, I rest, and reluctantly view future's sight, I look around, too, and smell the night.

It is dark under dangling tree leaves. Freshness smells, leaves rustle, as wind blows through.

Below are cars and trucks and other scuttling gas-spewers, but here, in the air, high above the road, I am safe, and I nestle, in rest, in peace.

Strengthened, again I soar up, and yet up, I go, feeling the grand ballroom of the skies, where all directions loft, where blocky white and patchy blue spirit away with you.

Coiling, snarling, freedom's ceiling reached -- arms tire -- downward, faster, faster, sawing arms, I bump the ground with despair; I awaken the other graceful flights, which end humiliatingly, the night.

A great cry surges forward, my grief, as those thousands of experiences burst -- a rock among light-bulbs, a saint among bastards!

Draggingly, carelessly, in my apathy, never caring, small thoughts slide upward, uninvited. I sleep gently, and pray -- Oh God, how I would breathe!

In my sleep I dream I sleep and in *that* sleep I view the beloved, dead-long-ago-grandmother, in her coffin. Pico-seconds are too small to flesh her out as bulging bouquets push against plush silk-lining. There comes a flower with broad petals of most beautiful red, deep, blood-colored. It grows quickly and folds into rose buds of giant size and terrible beauty, and teasing aroma.

Otherwise I rest in the sleep, and the sleep within the sleep, and all is well.

Soothing warmth inside wintry blasts greet my morning. For school I prepare my second best-suit-coat -- the one with narrow lapels and small, nearly invisible pin-stripes.

All around are girls and boys. See Mary Study! See Peter study! While others sneak comic books behind large geography books. *She* can't see the comics; I wish I had thought to bring mine. I feel so naked without it, and the clock moves so slowly.

Teacher's eyes pierce me, stabbing with tiny lined, jagged hooks. I scribble numbers on paper, closing my eyes ever so often, and scrunch my brow to pretend hard thinking.

She turns away. I -- a boy again, human, normal.

The boy next to me opens his desk and lifts out a guitar which grows and grows until I think it will pop. *Then* what will old hook eye do?

He plays; others sing. Everyone joins to sing, to clap, to dance, and he rides it -- a rectangular box-shaped guitar sweeps him side-wise and tows its keys back and forth. Its shoulder string strains as it prances and bucks, a mockery of the blood and flesh horse. Music pours forth from elsewhere.

One disappears, forming pencil flares of light, but we continue clapping and stomping until night; and granite-hard joy remains impervious.

Home again I lay on my hard slab to dream, unfolding images upward, focussing them sharply with crystalline tones. My hands sweep forward in expert piano movements. Classical arrangements, dixieland, pop -- sharp, brilliant melodies captivate the silent depths of my soul!



Gushing upward, outward, the music boils, flows; I am the chords scratching away brittleness which comes of being human.

My ego accepts, sweeps along, swelling and expanding with pleasure over notes and their inter-bonding structure; I marvel at my ease and proficiency, for in real life, though I practice hard, *I cannot play a note!*

Self-awareness of my own musical genius, as with self-appreciation, depreciates the talent. Like water from wet cheese it drips my capacity away, and I awaken with keen sorrow; I cry again.

My slab is solid underneath and around me is the silence of the night and I wonder, which is reality? The dreams? Or -- the night?

Goose-down mattress fluffs with sibilance of breathing air as I toss and turn, torn by my ambiguities, scarred by my inconsistencies. Wonderment, concern -- has all been real? Should people disappear? Will I disappear, too?

Startled adrenalin jumps my heart. Quicker my thinking plunges to encircle like a spinning wheel; I sway back and forth in ever-tighter circles; then, grasping one central, prominent idea -- the disappearing humans -- I steady to form a stable angular velocity.

Insane?

Psychedelic?

A figment, bound by alien mental imagination?

I pinch me. Ouch! Oh how it hurts!

I am enclosed in signal-killing wrappers where sight, sound, touch, smell and taste are not.

Monsters from outer space have descended; they are capturing and destroying selected humans.

Is reality?

Where is Occam's razor, and does it apply?

Alien with sensations, moods, nervous structure, tongue and taste -- do I belong? And what of the disappearances?

When I reach the camping trailer tucked between rows of soft-murmuring pines, I throw myself on plywood-hardened mattress to worry away the formal rhythm of life.

Dreams come. They flicker and flash, colours and half-lights, sensations -- never pausing long enough to say, "This is what I am!"

I awake. The fire starts with last night's bacon-drippings and it sputters and fills the morning air with hickory smoke, a pungent smell, a pleasant, man-filling smell. I fry eggs and think.

Where is Occam's razor? Which is the simpler hypothesis?

All around me campers stare. Until I look down I think it is the pleasing hickory smoke; but, except for my high-school ring, *I am naked!*

I cross my hands in front of my genitals to hide when everyone laughs -- some in loud, coarse guffaws, others in gentle, tinkly titters.

Though I run zig-zags there are not clothes to wear. Is there a hole smaller than nothing?

I grow, though, when some disappear in blinding white light.

My ego sinks down and inward until, like a pigmy inside the giant's space-suit, my ego sits there to objectively grasp, synchronize and decide on incoming body-signals.

Illogically, inside the protective suit of my body, I feel huge, giant-like, capable now of non-emotional thoughts.

My body burns with its embarrassment and I, with complete objectivity, change its color. Anger, grief, apathy, fear, happiness and boredom are as easily controlled, their importance tags as easily



clipped. I think rationally, non-trivially, and I am in control.

Breathe! Breathe! Oh God, how I would breathe!

Hidden foundations of reality suggest, intuitively, that I 'Come, pick up Occam's razor!' Other truths pass in bright sounds and colors and shapes and smells and sensations, and I let them pass.

Now it is mine!

Beneath the melange, a block: John has a book! Mary has a book! All the children have a book!

Beneath the block, a knowingness: a truth irrefutably known, trivial, unimportant, for everyone:

'All who disappear return home - from sleep to life; from matter to spirit!

'Our father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done,

. . . , ' I say.

Then *I*, too, disappear, leaving behind my human body, spacesuit encapsulated.

For the thousandth time, my tiny experimental ship, now filled with excess metabolites and sans oxygen swings over the Rook Mountains, over the craters of Gasendi, Euclided, Landsberg, Reinhold, Copernicus, Archimedes, Aristiullus, Theaetetus, Eudoxus and Democritus, Campbell, toward the moon's dark side!

And, after the Lord's prayer, my last thought, still a prayer, still a plea, ringed with the shivering spears of jellied light, says, 'Breathe! Breathe! Oh God, how I would breathe!'

