

Generations Fly to the Light

It was dark sitting in the upper back patio, with some library light coming through glass doors. Vigils were over by 4:00 AM and there was a pause before 5:45 Lauds and the following Mass. I was drinking fresh brewed black coffee from a monastery in Venezuela and smoking Marlboros with Father James, retired abbot, our chaplain, and telling him about my vision last night during 7:30 Benediction before Compline. (We are a sleep-deprived lot here; part of the mystik.)

Sundays, on our knees, we focus ourselves on the round Eucharist encased in its burnished monstrance, but for not much more than ten minutes during the liturgical high point of this elaborately sung ceremony, while the other six days, at 4:30 PM, or 11:00 AM Tuesday and Saturday Expositions in the chapel, a core of us kneels for close to an hour. It's a lot more grueling than 7:00 PM chapel Rosary. Though some kneel there as well, it is only twenty minutes and this little refuge is twilight lit, closer, and womblike. There, secretly, many of us mourn the recent passing of dear Brother René, our leader in the Sacred Mysteries. He's buried out in the back with the rest of them, some civil war era: white crosses, green grass, a view, and close, reminding us.

I was kneeling before the altar in the cavernous white front of the church with a dozen priests and thirty or so monks, covered in their white robes. It was brilliantly lit from above and by candles while incense billowed upward toward heaven from the foot of the crucifix, closer to me. I was fixated on Christ, here with us in the gleaming monstrance, until the round Host turned into a sun. I commenced flying toward It; I'd long ago taught myself to fly in my dreams.

(I'd heard of my own father's passing last Thursday, just before boarding Greyhound for Trappist, Kentucky, in the heart of the knobs, not far from the Bluegrass Highway. This mode of travel is penance.)

A bit like an old black and white superman meets Flash Gordan, but darker, I flew through outer space, left hand extended toward the sun, right down at my side, grasping my father's hand. It was hard from a lifetime of work. I'd never held my father's hand before our headlong flight.

We were flying at ever-greater speed, closing in on the sun, when my father began to get nervous. I was towing him harder, straining until his hand broke off. Frantically I tried to grab his belt and hold together with my arms his body, which was breaking into more and smaller brittle chunks until they were dust trailing behind in the darkest Void... We were almost home... But, at least now he knows where to go and how to get there. He knows where to find God's Mercy.

The big bells began pulsing slowly, and then faster. The singing began again as the Host was returned to His Tabernacle.

After a pregnant pause for silent prayer, we began singing Compline, the monk's lullaby. Psalms 4 and 90 were our talismans against vipers' snares, and the lions and the dragons of the night, during sleep, or death. Then we poor banished children of Eve pleaded with our Advocate, our Mother. We cadenced on **Mary**, ecstatically. The bells pealed and we processed in two lines toward the abbot and bowed. He blessed us with holy water and we filed out to our cell beds.

Father James seemed impressed with the vision and he advised me on it. We talked a bit more and then all the bells began clamoring, calling us to Church. It is merciful that the Trappists prohibit bells heavier than 500 pounds as vanities, and there are no neighbors. I asked for and received a solemn blessing from my councilor and we walked on down the hall, to the Church, to sing Lauds to our God and celebrate a gorgeous Mass with twelve priests consecrating at the altar. The Sun found us still alive, beginning a new day.

The last time we talked, my father and I, we promised that whichever of us got to heaven first would wait for the other. He wanted me to share with him a bit of eternity, listening to stories from his grandparents, granduncles and aunts, sitting on the green banks of the Celestial River.

His name was Eugene Oscar Emond. It sounds better in French; that's what they speak in Heaven 'ya know.

Bon soir mon père, et bonne nuit.

This was a lot easier than writing fiction. I didn't have to keep track of any plot lines. I just described what happened.