

MAPS

BRIAN LELI

Words & Photos



VOLTAGE

It's 05:53. My apartment is dark but for the illuminated screen and keys of my laptop and my fingertips, which move in their conjoined light. But already what I've written is not really true, or not true enough, and so it must be expanded. Because it occurred to me as I was typing the last sentence that other parts of my body, beyond what lies in my somewhat fixed field of vision when I'm writing, are likely absorbing the same lights. And when I looked down I saw this to be true. From my knuckles to my biceps, my arms are darkened by the shadow produced by the angle of my hands and the position of my raised fingertips, which are still crookedly typing these words now. If I were to stop looking there, that's how the experience would always seem, and therefore be, truest to me, which is to say that the impressions left on me would, if not later questioned and corrected, always be false. And those false impressions might then be used in the development of other false impressions. And this could go on and on. My usual gaze while writing would be easy to diagram, as it would appear simply as a straight line moving from the two highest holes in my skull to



the brightly glowing light of my laptop screen, and then ricocheting down in another straight line, over the backlit keys on the keyboard, and around the softly-lit tubes of skin that fit like gloves over the fingers of my skeleton. It would take little time or effort. But things get more involved the second I change my gaze slightly. If I just crane my neck down I can see that my shoulders and chest are also awash in the same light. The upper part of my ribcage is as well, though to a lesser degree. And of course there are other parts of me that I can't see no matter how much I look around. My neck is in all probability dark under a shadow being cast by my jaw, while my face is almost certainly glowing faintly in the shining light of the white box I'm writing in, which I'm doing in coordination with the strange matter dictating what my surrounding world is from deep in the shadows beyond my eyes. That matter, a sort of organic computer that occupies so much of my head, where it often seems that everything exists, including me, and you, and the others, and truly everything, is perhaps not even itself aware of all that it does and can do. It is perhaps just doing as we do. Learning. Working. Getting older. Getting better at some things and worse at others. Taking on greater responsibilities. Working. Learning. Eventually learning less and



less and merely working. Performing ritualistic acts. Getting all its jobs and tasks done. All the while, from its beginnings on, being brainwashed, if one can say that. Perhaps it makes more sense to say that it is immersed. It is immersed in the flood of itself. Which is a central component of us. And in that sense it is almost sweet. Romantic. This organ lost in its life's work of us. Blind to nearly everything else. Devoted almost entirely to us. Sightless to what does not in some way enter into the dark-red worlds of us. Our brains are tangible and in our heads, working as elements in the impalpability of our minds, always. Mine is in there doing this right now, perhaps sending these words to me as a sort of cry for help, a message in a bottle, or a body, if I may, as it sits as a sort of mythical god-like creature, protected for life by my skull, outside of which is skin and hair and a head that exists in a completely different world, and that is probably now shrouded almost entirely in the darkness of this pre-dawn Monday morning, though I have at this moment no real evidence that it's there at all. Only the sensations I experience in the space where I believe it to be. There's the sense of a heavy tiredness being overtaken by caffeine, the dull pressure I've been feeling at vague and shifting points along the parietal and frontal bones most days for a



few years now, like something wanting to crack open and run free, something aging, suffering the consequences of many poor postures and clenched jaws, my walking on the wrong number of limbs for too long, my being born with billions of others without instructions for living, something declining at the same rate that it's piecing things together, something only beginning to dim and ache and break down in a single motion that will likely span many years, depleting itself slowly in an effort to reduce the post-death cleanup, or to improve the efficiency of death, rather, by leaving a slightly smaller corpse, one that if I live twice as long as I have so far, on this hot and humid November morning, might come to rest in a box or a pit of fire, though I'd prefer the latter as it's cheaper and I don't otherwise care what happens to my body as I exit life as I know it nearer in size and faculty to an infant than an adult. Is it me? Is that me in there? Alive only in that curious gray matter? Existent somehow only in the productions in my head? Are my thoughts in there with me? Who is making them? Am I? Or do they just appear? Is there any difference between us? Are we an us or an I? Is it the same us or I who was born on a morning in the American spring nearly four decades ago? Is it even the same us or I who woke up in the bed behind me yesterday?







ATOMIC NORTH

I

The man had been traveling for most of the month at that point. It had at that same point been some time since the last time the man had been traveling for most of a month, not to mention traveling for more than just a day and/or a night, or only just part of a day and/or a night, here and there.

There were roosters crowing as he wrote and the coffee cups were white and not as small as they had been at the last hotel in the city, the one with the enema option on the toilet. But the spoons at this new hotel in the smaller town in the mountains were still small, and in fact seemed even smaller than they had been at the city hotel, though this may have just been an effect of the cups being larger, and all but swallowing the spoons whole. The man preferred to use one of the two larger spoons he kept in his apartment only because he already knew exactly how much instant coffee mix to fill them with, whereas the two small spoons he encountered in each of the



hotels that had provided spoons, which one of the three hotels had not, and which, once again, varied in their smallness slightly from hotel room to hotel room, the spoons, had left the man feeling less certain, and therefore less calm.

The man did not always feel less calm in the face of things that produced in him feelings of uncertainty. But he liked to maintain some sense of a routine wherever he might go. And if in a different life-trajectory he'd spent all of his time traveling as he had been at that point, when he'd been traveling for most of that month, October, this too would have been a part of his routine, traveling as he had been and either feeling gradually less uncertain about the variously sized spoons in relation to the variously sized cups and mugs, or acquiring his own travel cups and spoons, and perhaps even some portable device for making single cups of coffee, as there would likely also be occasions when no complimentary kettle would be provided, to eliminate those uncertainties, the latter scenario being the much more likely of the two.

But so anyways the man had also lost interest in explaining himself in his writings and elsewhere at that point. So the things he wrote each morning in his fiction journal weren't attempts at that, as he believes they probably were in most of his



earlier writings. The man had begun to consider his fictional journal writings at that point, that October and still now, at the time of this writing, to be explorations of the self. Or maybe even just a self, as opposed to the self, or his self. He'd grown less and less certain over the recent months and years how much ownership he actually had over the thing he felt to be his self. And so as he relinquished some control over this self to something or other seemingly larger and infinite, and animated as though by chaos and randomness, that he couldn't identify, he also wished to explore what limitations this potentially grossly misperceived sense of self and its apparent chaos-randomized operations might have been/still be having on him as he might otherwise exist in its absence or its opening up into some further reaching consciousness where the things that had for most of his life seemed to encompass the world to him could be seen for what he was starting to believe at that point that October that they might actually be, i.e. merely sensations and whatnot passing through a cloud of consciousness that had so many better options available to one if one could just wake up each morning and locate the remote control, so to speak, within one's locus of existence and learn how to more adeptly use it, the remote control, to change



one's channel or to turn one's self off effectively enough to allow one's channel to be changed or turned off or moved without resistance through whichever wave one's sense of self in that moment wishes, finding pleasure in each and any of the movements across waves, saving one no small amount of energy and torment.

The man was having trouble writing whilst traveling, though. So he'd decided in the last few days of his travels to not bother for the first mornings in some months and to instead follow the course of his travels and his travel mates the best that he could, i.e. with the least resistance and feelings of moodiness he could manage to achieve. The man had been traveling with between two and eighteen people for about twelve days, and the vast majority of his earlier travels in life had been done alone, and he preferred to spend much of his time this way, alone, both while traveling and while not traveling, and if he went too long without being alone it became much more likely that his moodiness would skyrocket and something inside him would crack open and leak and move inside the people whom he, the man, was with, almost like in a dream reached only when one has moved into deep sleep and the one sleeping tells the one in the dream not to do something



and the one in the dream does it anyway, ultimately leaving the one who is sleeping to deal with the consequences. And so his moodiness at that point around the middle of that October was simultaneously occurring in him to a greater degree than usual and being displayed for more to see in more hours on more days, leaving the man to feel vulnerable to the building pressure within the thing inside him that he very much wished would not fracture and spread.

It did not help that the man had not been exercising or meditating properly or, as just mentioned, able to write much during his travels, as these were all things that he usually did each day when alone, each one of them acting as a regulatory mechanism for keeping his less desirable qualities at bay and lifting him up to a place in his mind that would allow him to move through his days having achieved to some degree the elusive grail of calm he also carried hidden in him, and which carried hidden in it his, the man's, abilities to function with ease and a greater compassion for others and less loathing for himself, or his self.

So this is how he spent the remaining days of his travels, going with the flow, as they say, or at least in a sustained effort to go with the flow. He was not entirely successful in this,



and it should be noted that his billowing moodiness did not go unnoticed. But still, he managed it as effectively as he could, and while he couldn't find the head to write or the room in or around himself to exercise, he did manage to establish a routine of mobile, travel-sized meditations, which he practiced mostly in cars traveling up and down mountains and across long hot highways.

And then upon waking up alone on the first morning after his travels had ended, and while one of his travel mates, his mom, was still at an airport on an island shaped like a triptail perch, about six hours into her twelve-hour layover, the man was able to return to his written explorations, but in doing so found that he could think only of her and their travels together, both through life and more recently through various cities in the northern part of the country where he, the man, now lived and wrote, etc. In experiencing these thoughts and the gentle friction of recent and not-recent memories, the man decided to take some moments to research and more thoroughly answer several of his mom's recent questions and curiosities.





As both an outward expression of love and an inward motion of self-repair, the man noted in his fiction journal that Thailand had taken a neutral stance in the Second World War prior to December 8, 1941, when it was invaded by Japan. Thai troops fought for some hours to defend the country from the invasion, but a ceasefire was quickly agreed to that would give Japan strategic passage through the country while also, purportedly at least, allowing Thailand to retain its sovereignty and independence. Soon after the ceasefire was agreed to, and with Japan's invasion of British-held Burma on the horizon, a military pact was reached to establish a force of about 70,000 troops in the northern Thai city where the man traveling in this story now lives. The city would serve as the headquarters of the Japanese Army and Air Force until the end of the war. Very few battles were fought in northern Thailand, but two aerial squadrons were one day ordered to raid the cities of Chiang Mai and Lampang. As far as the man understands it, the squadron sent to the city where he now lives, i.e. Lampang, never made it that far, apparently mistaking Lamphun



for Lampang, looking from above at the wrong place, divided from the right place by mountains, seeing nothing of concern, and turning back before ever arriving at the intended and heavily fortified destination. But so now he, the man, remains unsure about the exact reason that all of the Japanese soldiers were discovered buried beneath the school where he now teaches. Perhaps it was a burial ground of sorts for troops killed elsewhere, felled by ordnance or other forces falling also from above, rather than the site of an attack itself. But the man, his mother's son, isn't sure.

The man noted also in his fiction journal that, shortly before eating dinner in the small upstairs room of a fairly exceptional French restaurant they'd stumbled upon in Chiang Mai, while the sun was just starting its descent, the man and his mom walked in a circle around a large structure set back some distance from a temple. She, the man's mom, asked him how they could learn more later about what they were looking at, as there didn't appear to be anything of note in English in the space surrounding them. So the man found the structure on a map on his phone and dropped a pin and wrote a note to himself. He would several days later recall that note while writing a story in his fiction journal in which the man in the



story addressed his mom in the story to inform her that Wat Chedi Luang was ordered constructed by King Saen Muang Ma in the fourteenth century to enshrine the ashes of his father, King Saen Muang Ma's. It would take nearly a century to build. When it was completed in 1475, King Saen Muang Ma was long dead and the country was under the reign of King Tilokaraj. But still, there it stood, almost a hundred years removed from its inception, reaching a height of about 85 meters with a base diameter of about 55 meters, the tallest structure in the Lanna Kingdom. In 1545, an earthquake struck and toppled part of the temple, reducing it to a height of about 60 meters. It was reconstructed in the 1990s to look as it did when the man and his mom walked across the street from their hotel with the toilets with the enema option to look at it. The reconstruction was not without controversy, though, as some say the new elements more closely resemble the styles of Central Thailand and not the Lanna Kingdom, which is not insignificant, as the different regions of the country, especially as seen through the eyes and histories of the locals spread across generations, are viewed almost as different countries entirely, with different ways of eating and speaking and living that are effectively seen as separate wholes existing outside of one



another. Here is atomic north. Here is atomic northeast. Here is atomic south, and here is the atomic center. Together they form a whole, a Voltron, but they are not the same.

And while the man can't imagine a scenario in which he would have the desire or means to spend a hundred years constructing anything for anyone else, including his own mother or father, both of whom he loves very much, it is not this fact but rather the fact of his occasional moodiness in their presence and the moodiness he sometimes even directs straight at them, not to mention his now-normalized absences on holidays and birthdays and all of the other days in the years, that often leads him to consider the possibility that he is in fact a bad son.

Because this is life, there will be death. And unless he dies first, the day will come in his life when his parents die, and he already knows the pain he will feel from then on for not having been good enough and for not having been there with them enough when they were alive. He knows it because he feels it already. It's not a pain the man walks around with all or every day. But he often wakes during the night and in the morning in a state of pain and anguish and doesn't know why. After a shower and some coffee, the feeling fades. But it's still



อินทรีย์บัณฑิตเครดิต
ขั้นต่ำ 500 บาท

เวลาขายเครื่องดื่ม
แอลกอฮอล์
17.00 - 24.00 น.
ไม่ขายเครื่องดื่ม
แอลกอฮอล์ให้เด็ก
อายุต่ำกว่า 20 ปี



there in him somewhere, he knows, and it will come for him again in the night, he knows too.

And while he can't say with any precision the exact source of this feeling, he has the sense that it's rooted somewhere in the sum of all of the thoughts and feelings he's hidden away or repressed, both knowingly and unwittingly. It is as though he is host to various ghosts and demons that he recognizes but can't identify by name. They are all there, piled up inside, anxious to shine from within their surrounding darkness, to come back for him when his conscious mind looks away. Maybe this is how it really is, and maybe it's not. But it's how it feels, how it seems to him in his mind, the man, and this is the only basis there is for reality, his.

What does time do to intent? Have King Saen Muang Ma's ideas and intentions for honoring his father been all but erased? Toppled and built on top of, rather than upon? Is there any connection between the intentions of the Japanese soldiers excavated from the earth and the school that now stands where they once lay? Or between those same soldiers and all of Japan, or Thailand, or Burma/Myanmar? Europe or the U.S.? Elsewhere? Does one's intent truly live even in the moment it arrives, or live on in the moments that begin cascad-



ing immediately after it? And, even if it does, where did that intent come from? Who or what put it there? Did anyone or anything? Or was it just another brief and flashing light shooting through the sparkler of chaos and randomness that exists in everything around us, and in everything in us, that keeps nudging us all along through the unspoken promise we make to ourselves everyday to not turn out the lights, even though it would be so easy?

The man asked himself these questions in his fiction journal, uncertain of the answers, but calmed for whatever reason by the mysteries therein, delighted and excited by the prospect of living for some moments more with them passing through his mind, and no less so delighted and excited by the prospect of one day dying after having experienced them burning out along their course. And these mysteries, seemingly of their own volition, somehow made the man wonder again about the name of the flower that his mom had asked about just before she'd left Lampang for the airport. So he spent some time searching the internet for pictures of flowers native to northern Thailand but found none matching the image in his memory of the one she'd asked about. This did not, however, diminish the warmth he'd felt emanating from that image,



which was an image of the flower having just been cut from the garden by the owner of the home where they'd just eaten lunch. The flower had been cut upon her, the man's mom's, inquiry about its name. It had been cut for her and wrapped at its stem in tissue and placed on her lap, where it was seen almost immediately by everyone present to resemble greatly the floral pattern of her dress. Perhaps one day its name will appear, passing through someone from somewhere.



















UNSEEN WATER

On a morning in what he used to call the future the man was still living in the town he used to say he might live in forever and doing what he called his daily exercises. We don't know the year or the town or exactly how old the man is now. But he is what most would call an old or older man.

Some of the man's daily exercises are physical exercises. Though none of them are the kind of physical exercises that would require gyms or other people or much equipment. They are exercises the man had chosen at various times over various years, whichever years they might have been, for their ability to be performed in virtually any setting. Yoga. Shadowboxing. Pushups and sit-ups and the like. The occasional bike ride through the countryside. It should perhaps be noted, though, that the bike rides had already, by the morning in question, grown less and less frequent, due in part to reasons related to setting and equipment restraints that can perhaps already be inferred, but also due in part to the town's merciless heat.

All of the man's other physical exercises could be done alone from the space between the bed and desk in the only room in



the man's small house that he bothered to spend much time in anymore. The principal function of the man's daily physical exercises is and always was, in addition to providing the man with a sense of discipline, to provide him—and in turn, by default, to provide the handful of others who have at one time or another in the unknown recent years been a part of the man's life—some respite from his primary daily exercises, which we will learn now mostly consisted of the man's review of his thoughts and memories, coupled with appearances by certain characters from certain pieces of film and literature and music, coupled again with the act of writing.

There are rules involved in the man's daily exercises. We don't know the rules yet. But a closer review of the man's habits and the exercises themselves will reveal much. This is true also of the man's subordinate daily physical exercises, noted earlier only as the man's daily physical exercises. The reason his exercises don't require much or any equipment or gyms or other people or the man's leaving the house is because, we will now learn, these are several other of the man's rules. The things just mentioned have all long been instinctively prohibited by the man, but were more officially prohibited when the man on some year or another noted them in a composition notebook



or in the TextEdit application on his computer. From his daily physical exercise rules alone, we might be correct to theorize that the man does not want to willingly form attachments to things, and then incorporate those things into his daily life, if those things can be easily stifled or taken away by outside sources. We might also learn here that the man is a minimalist, not as a matter of style but rather as a matter of keeping order of his surroundings in an effort to better manage the lack of order in what he calls his inner terrain. We should also have learned by now that the man is a solitary man.

The man's name is not Sunshine but his mother once told him he'd have been named Sunshine had he been born differently. He doesn't wish anymore, as an old or older man, to have been born differently. But for the sake of this narrative we will call him Sunshine beginning here. When Sunshine thinks about what his mother told him re: his birth name and gender, he is struck with a flood of feelings and images from his childhood home. But two particular of the moving images are paramount at the time of this writing, on an air-conditioned morning approximating fall.

In one Sunshine yells "Fuck you!" at his mother one morning while waiting for his friend to pull into the driveway to



take him to school. Her reaction was fierce and appropriate and Sunshine stopped waiting for his friend and instead started walking out the door and across the lawn and down the driveway and through the cul-de-sac with tears in his eyes. His friend turned into the cul-de-sac in his red sports car of some or another make and model, blaring the music of one of the handful of heavy metal bands that Sunshine and his friends all listened to at that time. Sunshine dried his eyes and got in the car and lit a cigarette and didn't talk much in the car or subsequently at school.

In the second of the two paramount moving images, Sunshine is younger and there's a small party in the backyard of his childhood home to celebrate either his Communion or his Confirmation into the Catholic or the Christian Church. A song from a band that Sunshine and his mother both enjoyed at the time is playing on the stereo. Sunshine and his mother are both singing along. Sunshine is eating some sort of cheese-flavored cracker and laughing while he is singing because his mother is hugging him tightly while she is singing. Someone is recording this on the family's camcorder. Sunshine would later watch the video with his brothers on the family's VCR. Some years later Sunshine would abandon whatever little faith he



might have once had in the Catholic or Christian Church and God.

Sunshine is also part of the title of a movie the man we're calling Sunshine remembers being fond of many years before whichever year it is now. He associates that movie with his then-feelings of deep sadness and devastation, stemming mostly from the then-recent dissolution of a relationship that the man had been in for some years prior to seeing the movie, but also with a kind of peace and inner warmth arising from those same then-feelings, and also numerous quiet train rides into the city of Chicago from a suburb of Chicago in the morning on weekdays in the winter before work, and a calming snowfall, and melted ice and snow moving coldly through the recessed lines in the aisles between the seats on the trains.

Sunshine has now at his desk in his preferred room in his home a chair with a lever with three strategically placed arrows amongst the words LOCK and FREE and UPORDOWN [sic]. He often sits at or near his desk in this chair with a cup of instant coffee, performing his primary daily exercises. The font used in the lettering on the lever of Sunshine's chair on the morning at hand calls to mind the work of a man whom Sunshine doesn't know personally but whom he has admired greatly for



some time. The man, years ago, was known mostly as a stand-up comedian but had involved himself as the artistic lead in many creative forces that had, at many points in Sunshine's life, moved through him like song, as Sunshine sometimes described it. Sunshine once wrote to the man, whose name is not Charles but whom we'll call Charles here, to tell him that, that he'd written and directed and acted as one of two people in a 43-minute video-dialogue that Sunshine would, after watching many times, continue listening to repeatedly for weeks, the way one might do with a song or a piece of music.

The male lead in the movie with Sunshine in its title that Sunshine had years earlier grown fond of was also a man Sunshine had begun to admire some years after the movie was released. The male lead's name is not Sam but we will call him Sam starting here as Sunshine now associates that male lead with a neuroscientist/philosopher/author/etc. whom he also admires and whose name is not Waking Up but whom we'll call Waking Up if returned to again.

The other actor in the dialogue written by the man we're calling Charles was known to the man we're calling Sunshine only from the actor's role as the sister of the lead character on a U.S. TV series that originally aired for about 10 years from the



late 1980s to the late 1990s, or while Sunshine was still living in his childhood home in a suburb of Chicago. The actor's name is not Carbondale but we'll call her Carbondale here and in any future places where she might appear to Sunshine on the morning at hand.

The reason the man we're calling Sam from the movie with Sunshine in its title made Sunshine think of the man we're calling Waking Up is Sam did an interview for a documentary about one of another of the roles he'd done some years after having done it, and even more years after having done the role in the movie with Sunshine in its title, in which he talks briefly about his disbelief in free will, which Waking Up had been well known, in part, for also disbelieving, and making a solid case for his disbelief and our collective disbelief, around this same time.

The man we're calling Charles, whom Sunshine has also often considered to be a kind of philosopher, and the female lead who played the sister of the woman we're calling Carbondale in the U.S. TV series from the 1980s and 1990s and again some years later when the series returned to television and the decades had already started to become less and less distinguishable, and also one of the two characters performing



the dialogue written by Charles, or Charlie, were both publicly condemned some years before the morning at hand, at very successful points in their careers. Charlie for a string of past incidences involving masturbating in front of women, with their consent, that had resurfaced at what many would call an inopportune time, and the fictional sister of the woman we're calling Carbondale for having said very publicly what many took to be an especially racist and necessarily-punishable remark. Both Charlie and the fictional sister of the woman we're calling Carbondale, whom we'll call Donald if returned to again, never fully recovered from the incidences mentioned. Sunshine's thoughts on the matters then and now are that both Charlie and Donald behaved inappropriately to different degrees. And while he is a great admirer of Charlie's but not particularly one of Donald's, he believes and once wrote in a notebook and on a computer that virtually no person or action is wholly irredeemable. Even the female person and the ugly actions of the female person we're calling Donald.

Sunshine had begun thinking on the morning at hand about another of the characters in the man we're now calling Charlie's episodic series when his daily exercises were disrupted by the woman whom he'd, Sunshine'd, begun in re-



cent years thinking of as his companion. He'd referred to her in an email drafted and sent several days earlier as an imperfect companion. Some context is perhaps relevant here, so the several sentences surrounding the emergence of those words from Sunshine's circular thoughts are as follows.

"I don't think the answers are apparent or without a great deal of complexity, from all viewable angles. What all of this means, though, I don't know. I'm old now. Older, anyway. Old enough. Well past the silly noises of youth. I'm not chasing the perfect relationship. Nor do I feel there is only one person in this world for all of the other one persons in this world. Those are thoughts for fools and adolescents. So for me now it is essentially a question of: Would I prefer to have an imperfect companion or to spend the remaining years of my life alone? Is there an existence that could be a combination of the two? The answers might seem obvious but they are as yet unclear to me. I enjoy being with her when I enjoy being with her. But I have spent a lifetime enjoying and crafting my time alone. In performing my daily exercises I've created a world separate from the one we share. Each day that passes, that world grows larger, more intricate and complex. I find myself wondering more and more now if what I'm really making with my exercises



is a choice that will soon have to be made. A choice of which world I want to live in. The one I've been willingly imagining or the one I just found myself stumbling through some years ago, which I'm still not sure is not also just a figment of my imagination. It's a wonderful thing. Being able to step between these two worlds. Because they are wonderful worlds. But they both require such different things of me. And there's no map for either. But only one affords me the opportunity to make my own. But as much as I enjoy spending my days alone and in that world, I don't know that I will want to die having spent so many of them this way. Though I also don't know that I won't."

The man whom Sunshine had begun thinking about when his exercises were disrupted was a film director/etc. who'd acted as a sort of sage in several episodes of one of Charlie's episodic series. Sunshine admired the director for his films, but he also admired him just for his strange ways, his peculiarities. This was true about almost everyone Sunshine admired. They were outcasts who'd tapped into things new and strange and great and found some connection there. Sunshine had watched several documentaries about the film director, whom we'll call TM here. And from those documentaries, coupled with TM's body of work, Sunshine extracted no small number



of things that he felt either could or already did apply to his own life. A comprehensive list of those things is not important here. But what Sunshine had begun thinking about re: TM on the morning at hand was his, Sunshine's, shared predilections for drinking coffee and staying home and finding one's truest joys in one's own made-up worlds.

Sunshine's imperfect companion, whom we'll call Sarah from here on out, disrupted Sunshine's daily exercises on the morning still at hand by telling him that they'd need to go to a nearby temple to give offerings to monks in adherence with the Buddhist holiday being observed that day. Sunshine agreed to drive to the temple after drinking one cup of coffee and writing for as many as 30 minutes in the fiction journal that he kept as part of his daily exercises and in adherence with his rules for observing the exercises.

We're calling Sunshine's imperfect companion Sarah here because Sarah is the name of Charlie's character's imperfect ex-companion, played by Carbondale, in the 43-minute video-dialogue mentioned earlier. In the dialogue, we learn as it progresses, Carbondale's character is 11 years Charlie's character's senior. The characters had years earlier been married and had children and then ultimately had what many would call



an ugly divorce. That is to say that they've already reached, at the very beginning of their 43-minute video-dialogue, a point of pure and savage honesty, and the result is what Sunshine can only ever think to call poetry.

In the world that they share, Sunshine is six years Sarah's senior. But his character associations, we should know by now, are not bound by any precision not found in his rules.

On the morning at hand, Sunshine drove Sarah around town on his motorbike. They stopped at various points along the way to buy offerings for the monks. The offerings included candles, basic toiletries, bottled water, plastic bags filled with Thai food and tied impossibly shut with rubber bands, clothes that would serve as a symbol to be sent through yet more worlds to Sarah's deceased grandmother, and several other things that Sunshine did not commit to memory. Sarah had also some minutes before leaving Sunshine's house written on a piece of paper torn from one of Sunshine's notebooks something in the Thai language for the monks to read prior to performing their chants and blessings.

Sarah drove on the way back to Sunshine's house. She was concerned, as she had often been over the years, about Sunshine's ability to safely navigate through the holiday traffic in



the town he'd in the distant past thought of as being the town he might live in forever. From the back of the motorbike, Sunshine saw a man about his age with long white hair and a long white beard sitting on a much older motorbike at an intersection. He was waiting with what Sunshine thought of as an inexplicable ease for the light to change. Sunshine saw him as being a character much like the sort that he, Sunshine, would like to be. Calm and cool and moving with the flow of an unseen water.

Later that day Sunshine and Sarah ate lunch together. By the following night Sunshine had developed a headache that he'd described to Sarah as feeling unusual. Several hours later he developed a severe fever and diarrhea and began vomiting. Sarah brought him to the hospital where her grandmother had some years earlier spent several weeks inside her dementia before dying.

The doctors and nurses told Sarah that Sunshine had contracted listeriosis. The infection had reached his blood and his brain and Sunshine's chances of survival were 50-50. Sunshine lay drifting between consciousness and unconsciousness in the ICU for several weeks, his body guided in part by the light of machines. His mind never stopped working. He kept per-



forming his exercises the best he could, stepping only barely with the tips of his toes between what had become to him then two indiscernible worlds. He kept the various characters and storylines and associations moving. There were no more computer screens or ruled pages. There were only the two worlds becoming one in his mind, the peaceful emergence of things new and fading. He could alternate freely between being the creator, the created, and the diminishing occupant of the body absorbing the warmth of Sarah's hand, her fragmented tears and laughter and breath.

The man we're calling Sunshine died in a bed with locking wheels 19 days after being admitted to the hospital in the town where he used to think he might live forever. His last thoughts involved his failure to mention in his fiction journal as part of his daily exercises that the reason he'd associated the man we're calling Charles or Charlie with the name Charles is because there was another sage-like character who'd appeared in several episodes of one of Charlie's series and whose nonfictional name may or may not have also been Charles. Sunshine was not burdened by this thought. It just floated over and out of him, like a cloud clearing a path for the sun.

The woman we're calling Sarah went on to live alone and



indefinitely and shared the following publicly in one of the weeks following the week in whatever year it was that Sunshine passed.

“[Sunshine] caught a rare disease called listeriosis that got into his blood and brain and led him unconscious for a few days at a time over the course of a few weeks. I was there with him at his bedside and, for a while, it looked like he might be on the road to recovery. At the end of [Sunshine’s] life, he was fighting meningitis, sepsis, a blood clot in the brain, two hospital-acquired infections, and a stomach bleed from ulcers. All of this led finally to a series of heart attacks that did him in.”

She went on: “Even in his final days, [Sunshine] was as strong and resilient as ever. Mentally alert and more talkative than usual, he was present and strangely glowing, and it was almost impossible to believe that his body was shutting down before my eyes. I would like everyone to know that he didn’t suffer in the end. He was in great spirits, telling stories, being sentimental and basically just being a big softie. A few days before he went, I asked him if he could see a light. I was joking. But I was only half-joking. He laughed and said yes because he could see the half of me wasn’t joking. A moment later he got a pained look in his eyes and said yes again, and started to cry.



He squeezed my hand and said in all seriousness, 'It's all just one big light. It's always all been just one big light. We're such idiots for thinking we have to choose between different lights.' And then I laughed and cried a little, too. It was funny and sad and beautiful all at the same time. Just like him. And just like life. He was asleep again soon after, and he wouldn't wake up again. For the past few weeks, I've been reading his daily writings. I've learned from them that he always gave the non-fictional people he referenced in the writings fictional names based on something or someone else he'd associated that person with. Sometimes he wrote as himself and sometimes he wrote as other people. There were detailed rules involved. I'm still trying to make sense of them all. But if you knew [Sunshine], or if [Sunshine] had drawn something or other from you, then he probably wrote about you in what he had at certain times called his daily exercises and at certain other times called his fiction journal. He also wrote about people he didn't know, and about fictional characters whom he felt he'd known and whom he felt had known him somehow. Not personally. But just what it was like inside him. They knew about that. Wherever you as a reader of this might fall into one or another of [Sunshine's] categories of characters and people, I want



you all to know that he loved you very much. However he may have behaved toward you or in your presence, which I know could sometimes seem ruthless, please know that he loved and cared about you more than it might have seemed, even those of you whom he didn't particularly like. [Sunshine] was both happier than he may have seemed and sadder than he may have seemed. But, for some years, he had found ways to be mostly okay with carrying those extremes around in him. He had even found in his later years what, I've now learned from his writing, he would sometimes refer to as his imperfect companion, or his primary imperfect companion. And to that nonfictional person, represented here as the fictional character we've been calling Sarah and whose words we're still reading now, I just want you to know that [Sunshine] had additional unconscious thoughts and associations that came to him in the form of moving images re: the light you asked of and you specifically while sleeping peacefully through his last hours of being the thing in the body of the man we're calling [Sunshine] in that hospital in Lampang with the pale-green walls that looked so gorgeous when the sun rose and set over all that sickness. He could not, however, be bothered to put those thoughts and images into words before leaving this world. So



we will look instead here only at the images and draw our own conclusions and associations from them. They are as follows. A vast area of darkness. Night. The center of a sea. The sense of being a bodiless presence floating just above the center-point of this dark sea-space. The sense that there are infinite worlds in infinite directions. The light of a single lighthouse shining in the distance, connecting itself to the outer things connecting themselves to it.”





PAGE 1	Lampang, Thailand	2018
PAGE 3	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2016
PAGE 5	Hanoi, Vietnam	2017
PAGE 7	Lampang, Thailand	2018
PAGE 9	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2016
PAGE 10	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2016
PAGE 11	Hanoi, Vietnam	2017
PAGE 13	Kampot, Cambodia	2017
PAGE 15	Jeju, South Korea	2018
PAGE 17	Siem Reap, Cambodia	2017
PAGE 19	Phitsanulok, Thailand	2018
PAGE 21	Siem Reap, Cambodia	2017
PAGE 23	Chiang Mai, Thailand	2018
PAGE 25	Nan, Thailand	2018
PAGE 27	Chiang Mai, Thailand	2018
PAGE 29	Nan, Thailand	2018
PAGE 31	Lampang, Thailand	2017
PAGE 33	Hanoi, Vietnam	2017
PAGE 35	Taoyuan, Taiwan	2017
PAGE 37	Taoyuan, Taiwan	2017
PAGE 38	Hanoi, Vietnam	2017
PAGE 39	Hanoi, Vietnam	2017
PAGE 40	Jeju, South Korea	2018
PAGE 41	Lampang, Thailand	2018
PAGE 42	Lampang, Thailand	2018
PAGE 43	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2017
PAGE 44	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2016
PAGE 45	Lampang, Thailand	2018
PAGE 47	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2017

PAGE 49	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2017
PAGE 51	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2016
PAGE 53	Lampang, Thailand	2017
PAGE 55	Nan, Thailand	2018
PAGE 57	Hanoi, Vietnam	2017
PAGE 59	Chiang Mai, Thailand	2018
PAGE 61	Phitsanulok, Thailand	2018
PAGE 63	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2016
PAGE 65	Hanoi, Vietnam	2017
PAGE 67	Lampang, Thailand	2019
PAGE 69	Lampang, Thailand	2019
PAGE 71	Lampang, Thailand	2017
PAGE 73	Lampang, Thailand	2018
PAGE 75	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2016
PAGE 77	Lampang, Thailand	2019
PAGE 79	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	2016
PAGE 81	Lampang, Thailand	2018
PAGE 82	Lampang, Thailand	2018