

A Promise Kept: The Mystical Reach Through Loss

by

Jody Collins  
B.A., University of Victoria, 2008

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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## Abstract

The meaning of loss is love. I know this through attention to experience. Whether loss or love is experienced in abundance or in absence, the meaning is mystical with an opening of body, mind, heart and soul to spirit. And so, in the style of a memoir, in the way of contemplative prayer, I contemplate and share my soul as a promise kept in the mystical reach through loss. With the first, initiating loss, the loss of my nine-year-old nephew, Caleb, I experience an epiphany that gives me spiritual instructions that will not be ignored. I experience loss as an abundance of meaning that comes to me as gnosis, as “knowledge of the heart” according to Elaine Pagels or divine revelation in what Evelyn Underhill calls mystical illumination in the experience of “losing-to-find” in union with the divine. Then, with gnostic import, in leaving the ordinary for the extraordinary, I enter the empty room in the painful yet liberating experience of the loss of my self. In the embrace of emptiness, I proceed to the first wall, the second wall, the third wall, the dark corner of denial, the return to centre, and, finally, to breaking the fourth wall in the empty room so as to keep my promise to you. Who are “you”? You are God. You are Caleb. You are spirit. You are my higher soul or self. And, you are the reader. You are my dear companion in silence. And then, through a series of broken promises and more loss, within what John of the Cross calls, “the dark night of the soul,” I am stopped by the ineffability of the dark corner of denial, the horror of separation and the absence of meaning, which is depicted as the grueling gap between the spiritual abyss and the breakthrough. What does it mean to keep going through a solemn succession of losses? I don’t know. In going into the empty room, I simply put pain to work in

order to reach you. Through loss, though there are infinite manifestations, there is only one way: keep going. And so, in a triumph of the spirit, I keep going so as to be: a promise kept in the mystical reach through loss. As for you, through my illumined and dark experiences of loss, what is my promise to you? I keep going to reach the unreachable you. In the loss of self, with embodied emptiness, in going into the dark corner of denial, with a return to the divine centre of my emptied self, in an invitation to you, I give my soul to you in union with you.

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to Caleb and Avery for opening my whole heart.



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## An Introduction

It is January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010. This is the day that I turn toward astonishment. From the corner, on this dark, winter night, I can see the inside the illuminated emergency room ward of BC Children's Hospital. I slow my quick steps. Seeing BC Children's Hospital, I am knocked senseless because I cannot believe I will pass through those doors. Here and now, I am dizzied as the naivety of past acceptance is violently introduced to the clarity of present pain: what is real? Concussed, I see reality—a meaningless, mundane motif—for what it is in all its transparency as a clear yet clandestine conclusion that effort does not necessitate success or ameliorate pain or locate solutions. And if it wasn't for this present pain, as far as reality goes, I might be nowhere at all. The impact is immense as my every day consciousness hits the formative reality of what walking into this institution means—a bird, a common-sense-making-scamper is grounded by a window made obvious with impact. I know this window as naïve realism. This constructed reality, a contract between everyday consciousness and meritocracy, is not shattered with impact—no. *I am broken*. And I took flight for granted. This bird will never fly again. On this night, I am only here, now where I expect to make sense of this dizzying reform. This, too, is naïve. There is no sense to make as I stand on this new ground. I will have to make something else.

From inside the waiting room, I look through the glass emergency room doors and see a boy lying on a fast moving gurney pulled by faceless attendants through the ambient darkness that absorbs space toward the entrance light that sterilizes time. On this night, I am introduced to that eight-year-old boy who is newly diagnosed with a brain tumour. This boy is my nephew, Caleb. *Of course, I know him*. On this night, I am introduced to

Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma (DIPG)—a terminal cancer that only occurs in the brainstems of children. *I cannot know this cancer.* Once he sees me through the glass doors, Caleb springs up onto his knees, and the white sheet falls away from his body to reveal his red, cotton pajamas. *I know these pajamas.* What his face reveals is beyond excitement. *I know this face.* It is the face of love that lasts through the generation of firsts. And this is a first. His right eye is crossed in toward his nose. This is too much to know. *What do I really know?* I am about to know that this tumour compromises cranial nerves that involve muscles for eye control. In time, with experience, I will know that if I rest my forehead on Caleb's, all eyes become crossed. On this night, between us, as three out of four of our eyes meet, if there is an original innocence that can be known as one pure astonishing moment, this is it—all other moments, then, are mere imitation.

Arms up in victory, kneeling on the rolling gurney, Caleb calls my name as the paramedics pull him into the emergency room. A Trojan Horse, he is here to win the war with the element of surprise. Yes. This is war. How can an eight year old be mythical as I describe? On this night, I just know he will have no choice but to find unimaginable, inner strength. This is an unfair, painful interruption in his childhood, but it is real. The Trojans can't know that which is now inside their high-and-mighty, clinical walls. Still, as they pull this Trojan Horse into their great city, the people of Troy take him as a trophy—a rare diagnosis and an exciting anomaly in medicine—but they deceive themselves. He is a gift. Left by the Greek army at the impenetrable gates of the city of Troy, great enough to hide thirty battle-ready soldiers inside it's core, the massive, mythical Wooden Horse is, in essence, the fighting spirit that wins with a combined force of generosity and surprise. And, like the Greeks with their magnificent Trojan Horse, Caleb will win with what is



hidden inside him. He will win with what he reveals. He will win with what he gives.

Here, now, I am introduced to *real* pain. But as with most introductions, I do not yet know what I am actually encountering. I do know that this moment seems truly unknowable. How can my usual framework for life hold this night? With this first impression of something truly unfamiliar, I am suddenly aware of the numbingly familiar episodes in my life that continue to interrupt this kind of introduction to what is entirely strange. What is this introduction? On this night, I don't yet know, but I am awake to something I never knew before. It is a painful introduction beyond any previously known reality that will endure. This pain is complete, and like most pain, it holds my attention here, now. And now, on this night, there is an entirely uncommon sense that I am introduced to a choice: I can stand away from the pain or I can step into it. And, once inside, with these beginning steps, no matter how I move, I know that I will never step outside of what this introduction means. *This, I know.* And I know that I must take this pain and put it to work. Simply put, in this culture of convenience, in that pleasure-seeking asylum, in this primordial practice of progress, pain is an inconvenience to some and a way of life for others. I accept that convenient way of life as the mundane. This *absurd* reality. This is not saying that I am giving up. In fact, the opposite is true.

The question is how do I generate possibilities from this pain? In the days to come, as doctors gawk at us, as people on the street walk confidently through the orb of pain that surrounds us, as truth is accessible by appointment only, as hollow-eyed guardians gather in waiting rooms, as the familiar faces of family turn strange, I do not yet realize that what I am actually introduced to is fury. I am introduced to real loss.

What is loss? The meaning of loss is love. Simply put, for me, the anticipation and actual loss of Caleb is an invitation to an open, honest dialogue with my soul: the higher, spiritual aspect of my soul. This is what I offer to you, the reader. Over time, as it works on me, in putting pain to work, I come to realize loss is an emptying of my lower soul so as to make room for spirit. This is a solitary, interior, and, often ineffable experience. In speaking to my experience of loss, as challenging as it is to put into words, at times, I will speak to “you”, as my higher soul so as to offer encouragement, companionship, and insights. And who are you? At times, you are God. You are Caleb. You are my higher soul and self. You are the reader, my dear companion, in spirit. And, in loss, in life, with a deep commitment, you are beginning to or already are working from your higher soul—in service of your spiritual nature and development. In speaking to “you,” I speak truth to my inner conviction that, as a promise kept, is “kept” in the mystical reach through loss. By invitation, you, the reader, are welcome to enter the experience of loss-as-emptiness and the dialogue directly so that, as I speak to “you,” being my higher soul or spirit, I also speak to “you” and your higher soul or spirit. If this invitation is accepted, you and I will engage in a dialogue that you, in reading, are welcome to reflect on within your own dialogue with yourself, as readers do.

Loss is the experience of an absence of meaning. In loss, meaning stops. If the only meaning in loss is love, does love stop too. No. We keep going. This is meaning. This is love. Simply put, this is how I understand loss. Depending on the nature of the relationship, as a human or spiritual relationship, loss might be expressed as a moment or time of full stop. We are stopped in our entirety. Period. Loss stops us in our ability to make sense of the disruption of order in our lives. Loss stops us within our usual, easy taking-for-granted of

what is given to our understanding and what is given to us in living our lives. When compared to grief, the abstraction of loss, real loss is concrete. It is truly real. It is measurable by what is given to us in the here-and-now by what is taken from us so that it is gone. Whether we lose a loved one, our selves or our place in the world, loss is measurable in how we experience whom or what is gone and what meaning is stopped in us. Once stopped, we must show courage and ask: how will I keep going? How will I triumph in loss? Do we accept a period or lifetime without meaning? Do we accept this stop—as a loss of meaning—as all that loss offers? No. We must refuse to accept loss as an end. We must refuse to accept loss as an end to meaning. The opposite of stop is go. In profound loss, for a period or for our lifetime, *we must keep going* so as to not be a full-stop finality ourselves. I am not concerned with the sort of “keep going” that gets up and us dressed in the morning, even though that may be part of it. I am not concerned with the sort of “keep going” that allows us to go out and sit among friends who are not themselves stopped by loss as we are and who cannot conceive of how loss seizes our ability to move our minds, our hearts or our bodies through the loss so as to participate in life, even though that may be part of it. And, I am not concerned with the sort of “keep going” that seems to temporarily help us to find some solace in pleasurable, superficial or meaningful distractions or commitments, even though that may be part of it. No. Respectfully, I am not concerned with this level of loss, even though it is all a part of it. And so, with respect for all levels of loss, I will keep going. And, with a heart opening in sharing my loss and love, I invite you to come with me into the emptiness. What I am concerned with is the sort of keep going that relates to the soul—the higher soul and the spirit. I am concerned with the hidden mystery within loss. I

am deeply concerned with what is, what ought to be, what will be, and what can be revealed within the mystery of the soul in loss.

In a commitment to keep going, I give a personal account of a single soul's progress through three consecutive, interrelated levels losses: the first loss, of course, is the profound experience of the loss of Caleb; the second loss is the loss of the self, which within a transformation of self and awareness appears to be a death and loss of the self as it involves the loss of psychological time, the loss of the personality or the personal, the loss of the personal will, and the loss of psychic boundaries, as that which separates oneself from others and the environment; and the third loss is the loss in self-sacrifice, which resulted in the loss of opportunities, the loss of hope, the loss of one's sense of purpose or place in the world, and, finally, the near loss of life force. Meanwhile, I will attempt to give the reader a clear sense of what it is to keep going through the three levels of loss. Although loss offers gains in new knowledge, this transformative quest is first-and-foremost a commitment to being—as an unstoppable quest for self-transformation in the fulfillment of a promise kept—which is to say, it is a quest for a new quality of being and a new lucidity that appears to occur through the simultaneously painful and transcendental experience of loss. Simply put, with the loss of Caleb, with the death and loss of the self, as a necessary yet extremely painful step in the passage to self-transformation provoked by the anticipated and actual loss of Caleb, and with a faint heart and a loss of hope, as an embodied expression of total, unrelenting pain—as an apparent paradoxical purgatory experienced as a gain in liberation with dying-to-self and a loss of belonging in the world—with the loss of opportunity to actualize my potential, with the loss of my place in the world, and with the near loss of my life force, and, finally, within the soul's quest to find and answer to: how

am I to be here? How am I to be here on earth as it is in heaven? And so, I will write what is hidden inside me. I will write what is revealed to me. I will write what is to be given from the expansion and depths of my sovereign spirit and soul. I will give it to you.

As a promise kept, I choose you to be intimate with in the mystical reach through loss, in heart opening and in spiritual awakening. Here, I am inviting you to hold your judgment in abeyance so as to engage in this dialogue with a compassionate, loving, listening heart. I invite you to read with your heart. I invite you to know the only meaning in loss. I invite you to be the only meaning in loss: love. I invite you embrace the light and the dark aspects of your loss and your relationship with the divine.

The meaning of loss is love. I know this through attention to experience. Whether loss or love is experienced in abundance or in absence, the meaning is mystical with an opening of body, mind, heart and soul to spirit. And so, in the style of a memoir, in the way of contemplative prayer, I contemplate and share my soul as a promise kept in the mystical reach through loss. With the first, initiating loss, the loss of my nine-year-old nephew, Caleb, I experience an epiphany that gives me spiritual instructions that will not be ignored. I experience loss as an abundance of meaning that comes to me as gnosis, as “knowledge of the heart” according to Elaine Pagels or divine revelation in what Evelyn Underhill calls mystical illumination in the experience of “losing-to-find” in union with the divine. Then, with gnostic import, in leaving the ordinary for the extraordinary, I enter the empty room in the painful yet liberating experience of the loss of my self. In the embrace of emptiness, I

proceed to the first wall, the second wall, the third wall, the dark corner of denial, the return to centre, and, finally, to breaking the fourth wall in the empty room so as to keep my promise to you. Who are “you”? You are God. You are Caleb. You are spirit. You are my higher soul or self. And, you are the reader. You are my dear companion in silence. And then, through a series of broken promises and more loss, within what John of the Cross calls, “the dark night of the soul,” I am stopped by the ineffability of the dark corner of denial, the horror of separation and the absence of meaning, which is depicted as the grueling gap between the spiritual abyss and the breakthrough. What does it mean to keep going through a solemn succession of losses? I don’t know. In going into the empty room, I simply put pain to work in order to reach you. Through loss, though there are infinite manifestations, there is only one real way: keep going. And so, in a triumph of the spirit, I keep going so as to be: a promise kept in the mystical reach through loss. As for you, through my illumined and dark experiences of loss, what is my promise to you? I keep going to reach the unreachable you. In the loss of self, with embodied emptiness, in going into the dark corner of denial, with a return to the divine centre of my emptied self, in an invitation to you, I give my soul to you in union with you.

## Chapter One: Loss

Earlier that morning, hours before I leave my home in Victoria to go to BC Children's Hospital, I wait for my sister to call to tell me what is wrong with Caleb's eye, which a few days ago, turned in toward his nose. When I am not looking at my phone in anticipation of her next text or call, I am finally getting around to reading the Bible. Sean Virgo, my serious yet merciful writing instructor, told his writing students to read it, so, as I wait for the call, I immerse myself in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (142-183). I am reading Leviticus—passages about ritual and sacrifice—between call and text updates from my sister. I get word they saw an optometrist who, in not finding anything physically wrong with the eye itself, refers Caleb to an ophthalmologist to see what may be wrong with the muscles or tendons—possibly indicating a strabismus, a crossed eye condition as the result of weakened muscles. By text, I get word that after a quick examination the ophthalmologist refers Caleb to Kelowna General Hospital to get the emergency CT scan. I know Calvin, Caleb's father, is on his way from work to the hospital. When the phone rings, I don't expect my hurried "Hello" to receive a slow reply as the struggling speech and sobbing of my father who calls to tell me that the results the CT scan reveal, "Caleb has a brain tumour." I have never known such immediate confusion: the sound of this father-form of vulnerability and such terrible words, which I scan for truth in my whole being as a response and a refusal—"No." Then, I ask, "Where is it?" The last time I asked my father this question, I needed to know where to meet him for lunch. Instead of saying, "On the corner of Highway 33 and Spall Road, or "Next to Costco" or "Before "The Sails"", he says, "It is in the brainstem." And so, as our sobs and silences sync and our tears pool together in privation

over the phone, where exactly are we meeting now? I really can't say. In reference to human experience, some places cannot be named or relocated.

My father tells me Shelley and Caleb will take an emergency air-ambulance to BC Children's Hospital. He says to "wait at home to see what Shelley says." I know I will refuse his well-meaning instructions. I know I must go to Vancouver. It is given, this knowing what I don't need in staying here in this suddenly unbearable wrecked reality of life, as I know it. It is a refusal. What I do need is not available here, so going—not leaving—is all I can know to do. It is an important distinction: this going rather than leaving. I don't leave. But I must go. I must go—now.

Knowing it is too late in the day to take a seaplane, I call my friend Jessica to take me to the Swartz Bay Ferry Terminal. With her arrival, just as I am about to run out the door with a backpack filled with bits of clothes; toiletries; a gold-letter inscribed, white-leather Bible, a baptism gift from my aunt and uncle; and a small, framed school picture of Caleb, I dash back inside to get the framed picture of the same size of Avery. Pictured with thick, light-brown hair, healthy olive skin tanned in the Okanagan sunshine, wearing a bright red t-shirt with "Victoria" in large, pure white letters, this grade three, school photo captures Caleb's honest, open face and gentle yet intelligent eyes. In this grade-one photo, Avery is wearing a soft-yellow sundress with pale pink flowers, but her considerable yet sweet light cannot fit into the frame of the photo.

After a dizzying drive to the terminal, after walking onto the ferry, I approach the Pacific Coach Lines desk to purchase a bus ticket and to ask the driver where I am to get off. In order for him to give me a ticket and give me directions, I must tell him where I am going. Because I don't know what street it's on, because I can only look in his eyes and



shake my head, because with two wordless attempts to say what I certainly can't get myself to say, I pick up his pen and write what I can't say on his notepad: "BC Children's Hospital". Gently placing his hands on either side of the notepad, as an act to steady me and possibly prepare me for the full realization of where I am going, he says, "You need Kingsway. Sit up front. I'll make sure you get off where you need to go."

Turning my thoughts to practicality and Caleb, who will soon be sitting in a hospital bed, I go to the gift shop to see if I can find things to give him to play with. I find a small flashlight for him to play with in the dark. I find two new *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books. I find a small chess set. I find charades game. And, when I am at the till paying in silence, I find a hematite ring, which I will tell him is good for healing, as this absolutely everything I know about hematite stone. Although I don't know it standing here in this gift shop, beyond what I know about this stone, beyond what I will know about what I find in loss, beyond what I will need to know about the human spirit and heart, healing is almost everything I will know about life for a number years. When the bus reaches Granville and Kingsway, I step off, cross the intersection and run as fast as I can toward what is entirely uncertain. The way forward is totally uncertain except for one thing: the supremacy of love.

Late that night, after Caleb is registered and checked over by the doctor, after my sister and I read the preliminary report on Caleb's diagnosis, after I scrutinize the nurse's face as we ask her to go over the report with us, for me, on the first night at BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver I cannot sleep. With embodied attention, within an arm's reach of my sister who sleeps on a cot, within a golden light allowing me to gaze at my Bible and the pictures of Caleb and Avery, I go between laying on a mat on the floor at the foot of Caleb's hospital

bed and standing by Caleb as he sleeps, so as to will the tumour to leave his brain and go out the door. Considering I am not religious, I don't know what the Bible will do, but I know for me it is a symbol to take with me as I go into loss and beyond where reason stops. In every way, I am wide-awake. And because I am committed to keep going, as the one and only method worth mentioning, it seems I will never really sleep again.

Before I experience or know anything about the mystical reach through loss, this new state of wakefulness and watchfulness is what it is for me to keep going through the loss of Caleb and, by grace and with work, the loss of my self in union with the divine. You will be woken up in loss. You will lose sleep. In loss, love opens eyes and our soul.

A terminal pediatric brain tumour, the prognosis of Diffuse Intrinsic Pontine Glioma (DIPG) is nine months to two years at most with standard cancer treatment. The alternative is no treatment and a prognosis of eight weeks. Caleb is categorized as palliative from day one. Through Caleb's illness and dying, over the next 20 months, I work to support him and my family—an incredibly terrifying role complete with unimaginable challenges—by approaching the question: What can I do? The first answer is to show up—and fight! That's what you can do. Three days at home in Victoria and four days away in Vancouver, I ferry back and forth for three months to stay at The Ronald McDonald House where every day I offer love and support while researching for a cure—a hope of some kind. I follow a pediatric cancer symposium in Vienna and obtain abstracts and unpublished medical papers, one of which discusses second round radiation for kids with DIPG. Shelley and I present this to Caleb's pediatric neuro-oncologist—and indirectly to the radiologist—at BC

Children's Hospital to administer this treatment as palliative. Taking the lead in a fight for support for the new treatment, Shelley and Calvin are allowed to remain in easy, good relationship with the doctors. The argument we take is if Caleb is expected to die, why not challenge issues of long-term effects and grant us with more time with him? Finally, after months of preparation, such as the case studies Shelley gathers from other parents, the doctors agree to the treatment, which gives us six more months with him. A "Second Honeymoon," they call it. And although, we don't accept that Caleb is married to a terminal disease at eight years old, as anticipated, the effects of the radiation wear off and the tumour progresses. Meanwhile, I continue to search for the next hope, which begins with the pursuit of a new science coming out of Cornell University by a cutting-edge neurosurgeon who once we approach him with a rush to FED-EX to send off Caleb's records and x-ray scans, the researcher agrees to perform surgery on Caleb at a hospital in Mexico that is willing to take us. The procedure is not yet FDA approved and only done once out of country. The red tape is a moving finish line in our race against time. Caleb's tumour spreads to the point where travel and surgery are no longer options. No more race. The fight is over.

With acceptance in loss, we can seem to find opportunity even when faced with total helplessness. Ultimately, that's what I do. I accept my helplessness and Caleb's profoundly unfair and cruel fate. When I reconcile the lost fight with a new optimism, I embrace possibility, uncertainty and vulnerability. I find terror and beauty, both. Still, I am overwhelmed by the uncertainty as I watch Caleb die a little or a lot every day. I write out a short paragraph called "This Is What I Can Do" that lists what I want to be sensitive to insofar as supporting Caleb's physical safety while maintaining his dignity and attending to

his comfort and feelings. I also note my wishes to offer him love and laughter, and to create opportunities for him to share his wisdom, love and hope in a way to be celebrated intimately or by all as he desires. That piece of paper is my pocket. I read it when I need to steady myself, as I helplessly watch Caleb suffer and deteriorate. This list, of course, does nothing for his pain—or mine—but it does help me in my commitment to his comfort. And so, in loss, you, too, can find acceptance, embrace possibility, uncertainty, and vulnerability.

When I moved from Victoria to Kelowna to live with Caleb and my sister's family, I eventually recognized that I need help to continue to help when suddenly what we have for hope and a fight is most certainly lost. Again, I ask myself, "What can I do, now?" This question provokes my first session with Mary Ellen McNaughton, an incredible bereavement counsellor from the Central Okanagan Hospice Association. In place of our fight, in just three sessions, she supports me as I find a new hope to inform a more complete fight. This perspective enables me to attune to Caleb—to support his comfort, dignity, emotional and spiritual needs. With this help, I am able to go back to the house to support my family in a way that is personal to me and sensitive to them. It's remarkable what we find within as we find the courage to reach out. That's what you can do: get support.

My first concern is Caleb, to help ease his dying, to meet his spirit, which is exactly what Mary Ellen does for me in our sessions. She meets my spirit. And, in-turn, I then meet Caleb's spirit (and family's). However, as we work to make the most of every day with Caleb, the vulnerability 'to get it wrong' is paralyzing so I take a guess and do or say something— and sometimes I do or say nothing at all— with hopes to bring him comfort, peace or a moment of fun. I am encouraged to make empathic guesses, which is very

significant because within this stressful environment with rapid changes and growing exhaustion no one can effectively answer direct questions. With this approach, I am able to 'show up' with Caleb— to be present, to connect with him without fear and with an open heart.

Then there's my adorable, six year old niece, Avery. I believe just *being there* and present with her is meaningful since going through trauma with someone lessens the suffering and shock. Every evening, we walk through Hidden Lakes, a wooded area with two small lakes nearby the home, and through all four seasons and then some. At home, I work to include her in Caleb's illness and dying so that she feels loved and a part of the obvious pain and 'adult togetherness' that surrounds her. I encourage her to bring the cats and dog to Caleb in his room for visits and to give her Mom or Dad a hug as they organize her brother's medicine. These strategies are found in the very helpful books borrowed from the Central Okanagan Hospice House library. The books also guide me to be actively present with Avery, as she needs to express her feelings. Otherwise, I aim to consistently match her moods whether she needs calm and security or intensity and fun.

Often, I am the first person Shelley talks to about her feelings or thoughts. I accept and understand my role, but I am truly afraid. What can I possibly say or do? I struggle to imagine what is in between her words—amid the terror, anger, confusion, pain and grief. I just make myself available to sit with her, to be the eyes she looks into, to answer her sigh with a sigh. When I help Shelley plan and organize Caleb's last Easter, last Christmas, last Halloween, last birthday and his "9 and a half-year-old-birthday" party, which he asked for knowing he wouldn't live to his tenth birthday, I watch the carefully selected items chosen to help us celebrate pass through the hands of cashiers, over the UPC scanners, and safely

into plastic bags. I watch the immense distance between my sister and this cashier, as though if I don't watch carefully something critical, something she needs to survive will fall into the gulf between her self and other individuals with children who are well. There is often nothing I can say to help her in the inconceivable, immense pain of losing her son. We never really know what the right thing to say or do is in any situation. I do not know what to say. I do not know what to do for my devastated, heartbroken sister.

Overall, there is a lot to do—practical things. I live at my sister's for nearly two years, and as Caleb declines, he requires constant care. My sister and brother-in-law are—besides loving their son and holding every moment—completely focused as parents and caregivers. Through his illness and, more so, as he began dying, he wants them, only them, to provide care for him even though palliative nurse care is entirely available and present. These nurses, of course, direct his care and help immensely. In this way, the question—what can I do?—has more obvious, practical answers. Still, it isn't easy to know exactly what to do and how and when to do it while contributing to a grieving family and living in a household that is a home and a 'hospital', both.

In order to help, I accept that I am an instrument to do for my family what they cannot always easily attend to, communicate or even identify in terms of their needs. This perspective dissolves any impending notion of confusion, resentment, or regret. Sometimes, it is difficult to feel my own feelings, to be authentic, emotionally, but I do my best. This is what you can do. Trust yourself and your connection to those you love. On especially low, difficult days, this connection may be all that holds your family up—embrace the beauty in the thoughtless frequency, the stillness, and the silence in the connectedness. And be an instrument for your family. It is work—and it is good.

Our family is devastated that Caleb didn't "get through 'this' to get back to 'that'" life he loved. None of us will get back to that life we loved and shared with our loved one. For me, this means continuing on with a project that I started for Caleb. At diagnosis, this creative tool was intended as a way for him to explore and express his feelings. This grew into an experience of creating a fantastical story based in reality that we contributed to as he faced physical and emotional changes. We named his I.V., intravenous pole, "Ivy Pole" and, in the story, she was characterized to follow him around with nourishing but often annoying advice. A year later, with continued work on the story, when he could no longer swallow his food, he asked, "How can the blender be in the story?" We also chronicled fun moments, ideas and imaginings to build on the hero's quest. Now, through our story, I can remember Caleb in a way that honours him as I create my new relationship with him now that he is no longer present. Ask yourself, "What can I do with my loved one?"

What else can I do? The answer is easy to know, but hard to do. Take care of you. Go for a walk. Read a book. Call a friend. Write in a journal. Go to a show. Share your feelings. Talk about your experience. I was so fortunate to have a few caring witnesses and supporters with whom I shared 'my-Caleb' and my experience and feelings. Whatever you need, whatever it is, do it for you. Our time of helping will come to an end, and we don't need to find that we've lost our loved one and ourselves. I am grateful for the lessons that I will make good of with meaning and conviction. That's what you can do: be grateful for the lessons.

In self-giving, you are aware this is work is giving-work not getting-work. In other words, in the serious work of what it takes to keep going, in the mystical reach through loss, in

deep commitment to spiritual development, you are not reaching for notions that you are going to get more than what you will give. This kind of spirit-dimming wanting belongs to ordinary work. The extraordinary work involves holding the spiritual tension between what is, as what abides in reality, and what ought to be, as what abides in longing. Here, in this total commitment to reality, you, as reality yourself, will realize your highest spiritual life. And yet, I cannot promise you will get anything from what you give of your self to spirit.



## **Chapter Two: The Reach for Reverence**

It is September 23, 2011. A middle-class, hard-working family living in the Okanagan Valley, we all drive to Canuck Place Children's Hospice in Vancouver so as to be with Caleb when we passes. A successful, well-respected business-owner of a chain-link fencing company in Kelowna, with a deep appreciation for the natural world and different cultures, my father is retired to pursue his personal passions for hunting and world-travel. Together, my sister, Shelley, and her husband, Calvin run my fathers business with the dedicated, ambition to own it themselves, as they love their children and enjoy their friends and community with the fullest of commitment. With mostly private explorations in the domains of psychology and spirituality, my mother is a solitary, humble, intelligent woman who keeps a simple routine so as to enjoy life with delight and ease. My brothers and their wives, Terry, Todd, Charli and Tamara are all highly-respected, socially talented individuals who make big, meaningful impressions in BC golf industry, as golf professionals and tournament coordinators. With a profound commitment to spiritual development, contemplation, and service, I am the mystical one. On the last day of Caleb's life, I will be no different than who I am, which, in simple terms, is a complete commitment to all that I can be in service of love and supporting my loved ones. Generally speaking, without attending any church services or regular spiritual practices, I will say my mother is spiritual and my father is a Christian. We are a family of integrity. This sums up our families spiritual and religious background.

After driving at unlawful speeds to get to Canuck Place from Kelowna, on this night of profound loss, I am called, from within, to go without delay. It is past midnight. After going to get something to eat with my sisters-in-law, giving space to Shelley and Calvin to be with Caleb, who lies unconscious and on a ventilator, I climb the front stairs to gain entry to the 16,000-square-foot Vancouver mansion, Canuck Place Children's Hospice. With the press of a button and the sound of a buzzer, the massive door opens to let me in. Anticipated grief and loss, then, is a doorway to emptiness. This emptiness is an invitation for spirit to enter. You may enter it so that it enters you until you are emptiness, itself. Outside your loss, you will see others committed to fulfillment—fulfilling base desires or needs, that is. This is not your way. Your way is in emptiness. I cross the warmth of the lobby, which is cooled by a sense of emptiness that only loss can bring to a room. Off the lobby, to the left, there are a number of small sitting rooms, reading rooms, and benches for quiet, consolation, and to the right, are a dining area with a massive round table that seats at least twenty, a small kitchen accessible to families, and a recessed, commercial kitchen for use by the chef and volunteers only. The heritage house is immense, but intimate, in character, with a hardwood, antique-like designs. I ascend the wide staircase to the hospital ward. Then, seeing me from the top of the staircase, a nurse stops abruptly, gathers herself into a soft gesture of care, and says, "Caleb is gone". She says that he died just five minutes ago.

I enter his room and see what I expect to see: Caleb lying in the hospital bed, Shelley sitting on the edge of the bed, and Calvin seemingly held together by the corner of the room when this is certainly a time to fall apart. The light is dim. The room is muted by inactivity. The window is black with night. The metal is lackluster. I read resignation in the blank faces of the machines. The usual shine on the floor seems to have given up too. It is all now

gathered in a forced way. The life is gone except for how it appears to be animated within the thick, wet, blurry shield of tears that separate my eyes and the room. Still, it is nothing more than what it is: a room full of things that without a child to support no longer has a function. And what about us? How are we gathered now? For nearly two years, as a family, we gathered for Caleb. We gathered for each other. And because my seven-year-old niece is on her way down from the room where she was sleeping, we are composed as adults in support of her needs. My sister offers me time alone with Caleb. "I don't need to..." I begin to say, as I walk toward the door. It is given, this knowing what I don't need. It is a refusal. What I do need is not available here, so going—not leaving—is all I can know to do. It is an important distinction: this going rather than leaving. I don't leave. But I must go. And so, with one look back at Caleb's body, I turn around and open the door to go. I go back down the staircase toward a lamp. The body of the lamp is made of four crystal balls stacked onto top of one another. The base is a gold-leaf design. The lampshade is green. When the death of a child is immanent, the nurses or volunteers place the lamp on the desk at the bottom of the staircase, out in the open, so as to be visible to everyone in the house. Setting a tone of reverence, the lamp is turned to let everyone in the house know that a child is dying. When the child dies, the lamp is turned off. The lamp stays on the desk until the last family member leaves the house to go home. The lamp is lit to let everyone in the house know that a child is passing. The lamp is lit to indicate that a child's soul is *passing* from this place to another. Beyond the sensitive yet practical request for respect from other families in the house, this lamp is a symbol that lights a way. Caleb died. And Caleb passed. *And where am I going?* I don't know. I am just going. There are no words.

And yet, there is a word: *gnosis*. Simply put, it is inner revelation. From experience, I define gnosis as sudden yet lasting intuitive or mystical knowing that brings with it a special quality—a fully formed promise kept by the immediate, affective and affirming content of what it promises—that surpasses rational forms of knowledge as a knowing that *just knows*. Elaine Pagels, a religious historian and author of *The Gnostic Gospels*, presents gnosis as a type of knowledge that occurs by way of direct “insight” or “understanding” (15-20).” In *Why Religion? A Personal Story*, it is Pagels’ personal *experience of loss* that lifts her relationship to gnosis above mere scholarship to new heights of wisdom. For those of us who experience particularly profound moments of loss, gnosis seems to be permitted go beyond reason to penetrate the seemingly impenetrable, and, unlike what is usual for the rational mind, gnosis is not knowledge that is sought and accumulated. Gnosis comes to us. When we are in a state of going beyond what is readily known by way of what we lose, we find that gnosis comes to us. When we are opened by loss so much so that reasonable, conditional concepts break apart within an affective, inner field of immeasurable depth and vastness, gnosis comes to us. When we birth and nurture paradox—a set of twins—that are clearly opposite in nature but the same, because we know no favourite, gnosis comes to us. And, as on that July day, when gnosis comes to me, all at once, I am so *completely* yet contradictorily here and gone by way of a truth—born of absurdity or paradox—that comes to seize me and take me through the veil to the other side—and beyond my self—into an infinite realm of knowing by what is unknowable.

One July day, I know that together, only in separate ways, we are each opened by the scream—taking leave from the world of the sensible. We are prepared by the silence so that we may, just as soon as it appears as the absence of sound, open the veil, the skin: here,

gone, here, gone. We go into the supersensible. Caleb goes beyond the personal by the way of the skin. With the absence of sound, psychically, I go beyond the personal by the way of the veil. At this time, the veil is a sort of ethereal perception of what hangs and separates this world from the other world, so as to attempt to appreciate spirit, which exists in the other world. Seemingly separated by only one pulse, one beat, I am here, and, with the next beat, I am gone. What is it to be both here and gone? In a word, it is to live within what is vital within the paradox of being both here and gone. It is to live within an instant as though it is eternity. On that July day, except for what is heard, in screams and silences, and except for how it appears, as the veil, within what is revealed to me—an unshakable sense of remembering—as I gaze at my primordial pulse, there seems to be no way to sensibly speak of that contact with and expanded sense of reality or that profound state of remembering or this paradox of being here and gone.

On that July day, in that most private moment, as I sit gazing at the skin that holds my pulse in place, within the larger scene of Caleb's totality of pain, given and received as screams and silences, I suddenly understand that on its own—without access to the extraordinary realms of experience—the skin is an ordinary veil that conceals us from our complete nature, which includes our spiritual nature. Much later while in the midst of doing so, I know that I will pass through the veil in order to reach a new lucidity—a new life, revealed. Once we pass through the veil, we can only know our true nature by being it. While I gaze at my pulse, I certainly don't question what kind of life this sudden, direct knowledge sends me off to realize, but the intention lives for and rests in the potential of a life transformed: a life that is lived as both here and gone—"on earth as it is in heaven." This, of course, refers to the divine instructions of Jesus Christ, "Your kingdom come. Your

will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Although, on that July day, I only become aware of the veil, what I come to know—the deeper I go inward—is that in passing through the veil, I am being positioned “on earth as it is in heaven.” And so, with this, I remain sudden with “remaining” as here, permanently grounded in reason, and “sudden” as gone, in a flight of astonishment. Is there another elucidation than this? I am open to another explanation. And yet, this is a state of knowing, and as knowledge, it is a mere restatement of the direct experience of the immediate knowing, which does not seem to be contestable. Gnosis is knowledge that comes to us by experience, which is the very spirit of knowledge. The happening of it and the truth of it are inseparable. And unlike rational knowledge, gnosis is not something to be gained; rather it is by loss that we can actually realize something. Gnosis is a sudden, irreversible change in meaning. It is the stilled movement within a moment. How so? If belief is what moves us, awe stills us.

In his book *Meaning*, Michael Polanyi, a scientist and a philosopher of art, religion and society, advocates for the necessity for personal knowledge, as an artful way to participate—according to our personal commitments and passions—in both the discovery and validation of this personal knowledge. We are referring to knowledge by way of experience, but it is how we position ourselves—by refusal or surrender—in relation to our experience that provokes meaning. With an opinion that reason alone denies us the possibility for personal responsibility, Polanyi claims that, “we do not surrender to a symbol unless we are carried away by it, and if we are not carried away by it, we do not surrender (73).” The personal responsibility, then, is an express commitment of surrendering to something other than reason—a symbol, that is. This surrender is an achievement of profound meaning as soon as we are carried away by it. In rational terms,

what is it to surrender to and be carried away by a symbol? I consider how this chiasmus—a statement and reversal of logical structure in support of profundity—relates to how later that July night, when I look again at the pulse in my wrist—a symbol, a portal for insight—I wrote a sort of poem about how Caleb is passing through the veil, the skin: here, gone, here, gone. What is inferred in the writing of this poem is that I seem to both refuse loss and accept that I, too, will pass through the veil. And, although I cannot at the time say what “here” is and what “gone” is, I just seem to know that when I “surrender” to *here*, as in reality, I find that I am immediately “carried away”—and *gone*, beyond as sensory reality to transcendent reality. In practical terms, I surrender to and am carried away by the realization of a purpose, given and received, to live completely “here” and “gone” within the symbolism of what it is to live on earth as it is in heaven. In other words, in the same instant, as I am being carried away, I surrender to reality, as it is. This is a profoundly new relationship with reality and my self. In this state of being carried away, by what I know, I am carried away to a profound state of unknowing, which seems to invite a deeper surrender and a vaster state of being carried away. Because Polanyi claims the “surrender” and “being carried away” occur in the same *instant*, in passing through the veil, I realize that I am equally here and gone. I am astonished by this ineffability. And, yet, I am accept it to be as real as it gets since I am familiar with such flights from reason so as to soar to unexplored heights of understanding.

With a deepening in translation of the Greek term, Pagels goes on to say that gnosis is “knowledge of the heart” (28-29). I can go *with* Caleb by way of the heart. This is something that I just know. What’s more, I must. In surrendering to the here-and-now, I am carried away—beyond reason—by the perennial wisdom of the heart by directive of the

soul. What is “wisdom of the heart?” When my heart rises up to rest in my eyes, my spiritual eyes see now what is unseen. What I know is that this new lucidity, this new symbolic life is irreducibly remarkable. This, too, is a personal responsibility. I am carried away by what I surrender to, and, on this day, as I surrender to Caleb-as-boy and the presence of the pulse in my wrist, I am carried away by Caleb-as-divine and the absence of the pulse. I surrender to the screams. I am carried away by the silences. Not unlike the nexus, the pause between inhale and exhale, there is only a single beat—a God-given pause—that unites that in which I surrender to and that in which carries me away. On this hot, July day, that sacred symbol is Caleb who is both his screams, with an expressed awareness of here, *and* his silences, with an expressed awareness of gone.

Near the end of September, before I leave Kelowna to go to Canuck Place, I enter my manager’s office to tell her that I need to take three-maybe-four days off work. “My nine year old nephew is going to die,” I tell her. Then I briefly explain what she knows nothing about. Three or four days a week, I write copy and script for a trendy, sophisticated media firm. Not for the first six months of employment, and not a minute before I have to request time off do I tell anyone about the circumstances in which I live: coming to work from and going home to a dying nine-year-old boy. And, as August came and went, as we transformed the living room into a forested-campsite, with a homemade, make-shift campfire that appeared to smolder, with windows covered with hand-painted trees on massive sheets of paper, and with a lofted ceiling pasted with stars designed not to fall or be wished upon, as the time of wishes fell more quickly than a falling star, I didn’t tell any of my colleagues about the camping themed, half-birthday party Caleb asked for and celebrated. He knew he



wouldn't live to celebrate his tenth birthday in November. I didn't mention how I knew about a steroid called dexamethasone that swells the skin so much so that it stretches until it splits. I didn't tell a single person I worked with about how I spent my evenings. In the later days, I would take my seven-year-old niece for walks, to the beach, for dinner and through conversations about dying and death, using children's books from the local hospice. I didn't tell my co-workers that I had another immediate use for my creativity, which they appreciated—right away, in the first few days of work—in service of an important client, a clinic of maxillofacial oral surgeons that repair people's faces after terrible accidents. On the spot, the lead designer asked us, "After a bear takes your face off, what is first your concern?" "Insurance", said one writer. "Scars," said another. "Your smile; you want to smile again," I said. Reflecting their brand, a commitment to excellence, trust and, now, sensitivity, I then offered a winning slogan with multiple meanings: "We'll get you smiling again." I didn't tell anyone at the firm about my life because I didn't want special consideration to come between the usual, easy exchanges of human relationship and kindnesses. I only wanted to be considered reliable. And, I didn't want to upset anyone in such a demanding, creative environment.

At Canuck Place, gathered at his bedside, as Caleb lies unconscious, we watch for his expression to change so that our stilled hearts can move toward some outward sign of how each of us knows him inside ourselves. Instead, as his chest goes up and down with the help of the ventilator, with each inhale and exhale, we come to terms with the rising and falling rhythms of accepting and denying his immanent death. And, not even a week ago, within some more practical efforts of acceptance and denial, as my sister and Caleb ready

themselves to leave home for the airport and his one-way trip to Canuck Place, the rest of us helped to pack something quite beyond the basics. Meanwhile, Caleb's school principal arrives at the house strengthened by something profoundly different than school spirit—the pieces of his broken heart quickly gathering for an official, full-hearted assembly: a last goodbye.

On the ledge of the hospital room window, to the right of where Caleb is laying, there are some personal items that represent home: a Super Mario figure, a Luigi figure, a Harry Potter book and a single plastic pear from the bowl of ornamental pears on the coffee table at home. Imagining him right there when my sister unpacks the bag that I packed, I had added the plastic pear because I knew Caleb would laugh considering the highly non-essential nature of this fake pear. Before they left the house for the last time, I had also slipped a CD—an album Caleb and I made that we titled: *Caleb's Sail Away Music*—into my sister's purse. And observing a ritual started on his second night's sleep at BC Children's Hospital, carried on to The Ronald McDonald House, then at home, and now, here at Canuck Place, when I touch lavender oil to his temples, forehead and face, the scent in the room holds all of us within a vital serenity that awakens the ephemeral quality of time. Yet, this time, as if soaking into his skin like the lavender oil, my hand won't seem to let go of him. We are listening to the otherworldly, melodic song by Enya, an Irish, New Age singer-songwriter, with a chorus that tells us to "sail away... sail away... sail away." For me, now and forever, this song represents a heart opening moment inciting a tremendous, enduring authority on reality. It is an authority of a new order. Lying in his hospital bed at home, unable to move, his thoughts and feelings trapped just below the surface, I played this song for Caleb without asking him first if he'd like to hear the music. I walked into his temporary

room on the ground floor, dropped the CD into the player and pressed play: in an instant, as we gaze into each other's eyes, we were inseparable as we together navigate this moment. Then, after not speaking for weeks, in a forced whisper, he said, "sail away." Suddenly, a new horizon opened up. Together, now launched from the shores of the ordinary, we *sail away* from pain, we *sail away* from terror, we *sail away* from suffering. Cast out into an extraordinary vastness, set for full sail, our chests each billowed by joy, we glide *far* beyond words. We leave only everlasting ripples of profound affection in our wake.

And what about you, the reader, as the one invested in spiritual development, as one giving your time to read this and take some inspiration or instruction from me? If my simple method is to keep going, what can I offer you? In sharing my experience with you, in sharing what I learned about loss and mystical awakening with you, I will bring you with me. In speaking to your soul, in meeting your spirit with my spirit, I will instruct you and invite you to consider your own soul and spiritual development through the loss of a loved one and the loss of your self. And so, in our commitment and working relationship, I will say a few things to you about what kind of person you are likely to be if you are to come along with me in this invitation. The invitation is yours if you are responsible. What do I mean by responsible? Answering in the negative, you are not interested in being in relationship with the divine for ready-made benefits. No. You are very serious about this work, which is long and hard work.

Thank God for metaphor! Without the flash of light in metaphor, I would remain in the dark in terms of understanding and conveying some of my more incomprehensible and

indescribable experiences. And, that's just it. Metaphor cannot provide a complete description of this ineffable experience, but it can be a moving yet comparatively dim spark in an otherwise too-brilliant-for-words, whiteout of an experience. This experience with Caleb is undeniably mystical in nature. I know this, how? I know it by ineffable, mystical *feeling*. I know it because I cannot begin to describe it without metaphor. I know it not because of new knowledge brought to me—as with gnosis—but in how the *feeling* changes me so much so that I can hardly conceive of life before that feeling. Itself, as a moment, this is what it is for an experience to live so completely inside me, and that is what it is to be completed by the instantaneous opportunity to live inside an experience itself, as a movement. It is a moment of and movement within wholeness. All at once, by experience, in an instant, I am made to be whole.

Metaphor is one way in which meaning can be articulated in relationship to ineffable experience. If the experience is so deeply felt that it is truly beyond words, I know I can attempt to describe and make sense of it through symbol, myth or metaphor while still holding and honouring the positive feeling or the negation or absence of thought. Concerning Polanyi's exploration of meaning, in so far as how we artfully make meaning, I find resonance in his tidy claim that "we live in the meanings that we are able to discern" (75). This claim has real significance for what, in the way of experience, appears to be both indescribable and indiscernible—without opportunity of revealing it within a flash of metaphor. How can we discern and live in an ineffable experience? Metaphor invokes attention to form as it concretely reflects or captures the content of abstract thought or experience. Metaphor *attends* to the integrity of experience, *attunes* with the affective resonance of the abstract or ineffable feeling, and *reveals* the emergence of new insight,

awareness, knowledge and change—an integrative change in seeing, knowing and being, that is. Metaphor articulates a freedom, in form, from the prison of the ineffable content of experience, thought or feeling. In comparing what metaphor can artfully and affectively achieve relative to pure, cold reason in meaning-making, with metaphor I know a freedom from pure reason, as a lengthy, literal sentence served or, as judicious paragraph that paroles or liberates meaning, meaning by metaphor is an enchanting, spontaneous escape—with the help of the otherwise witless yet willing warden of logic.

Rather than sit with Caleb one last time after his death—to say goodbye—I go downstairs—alone—to the open lobby where I kneel on the floor and begin to cry like I need something more than crying—*from* crying. I kneel in *refusal* to say goodbye. Although it does not come to mind, if no one is around, I cannot be made to say goodbye. If no one is around, I cannot be bothered when I try to come up with something *other than* goodbye—a summoning, perhaps. And even though this hospice house for children, that trusted hospital ward for childhood illness, this terminus for respite and end-of-life care, that caring counsel for grief and bereavement is immeasurable, for all that it takes to *house* pain and suffering, in all that it gives to *house* deep solace, it cannot *house* what this heart is now being offered to claim. On that night, away from the discreet, candlelit ceremony at his bedside, away from his parents, away from his sister, away from Caleb’s body, as I kneel on the ground floor, as ribbons of tightly wound grief unfurl, spilling out of my eyes, nose and mouth onto the rug, as I hold the spirit to expose the source of what is opening up in me tight within my chest, I wail into these new, empty hours, as if the realness and rightness of the sound I make can somehow move me to: *follow him*. Forehead to the floor, I understand

nothing of what is happening to me. I only feel it—this refusal—working on me. At first, with each wail, I am moved out and away; wail-after-wail, step-by-step, I am closer to following him, but each time I take a breath, I am brought right back to the start—to the floor and to reality. Eventually, in a refusal to resign to reality, I can make each gasp, each inhale point me in the same direction, so that I do not lose ground. What I pull in pushes me further out. I am no longer the person who kneels with new knowledge of Caleb’s death, *as though resigned* and wailing about that fact. I am the person who stands beyond the boundaries of what is possible. And what is that? It begins with a refusal. And then, once again, if I do not surrender to the symbol, I will not be carried away by it, and if I am not carried away by it, I do not surrender. In words, I later determine, to begin with, kneeling on this floor, *beyond possible* arises as absolute affection and transcendental authority to: follow him. It is to establish and hold contact. This is absurd, is it not?

In *Fear and Trembling*, Soren Kierkegaard recognizes the “absurd” as not what is “logically impossible” but what is “humanly impossible” or “in any intelligible way possible” (Hannay xxiii). Although I wish to read his words more carefully for resonance with my feelings, I believe there is a way. It is the way of the absurd, which is to *do* the humanly impossible. What am I saying? *In loss, why on earth is resignation the only human or intelligible possibility?* It seems that we must go beyond ourselves, our logic and our humanity in order to *completely* follow what we set our hearts on. And so, within hours of ceaseless, intimate and fierce rounds of physical dialogue with the floor, “on the strength of the absurd,” I do follow him as I make the exact, right sound come out of me. It seems that this sound is to be no less exact than the silent break between each whole movement of bawling that bends the body over and toward what is beyond it. After hours of some sort of

active stillness, I cannot seem to move myself from the floor. And still, within this vow to follow him, within this total movement of the heart, it seems as though this ground is to be the most perfect place in which to project myself to rise from, through the ceiling, and beyond the roof than any immobile thought or desperate plea the walls can receive or any realm of reprieve the door can deliver me to. What then is the “strength” of the absurd that Kierkegaard refers to? If we consider this strength to be faith, as it relates to my *unrelenting desire to follow him*, as stated by Alastair Hannay in *Fear and Trembling*, we honour Kierkegaard’s notion of faith, which is not “plain belief in the existence of God,” who would be, in this case, let’s say, the better keeper of Caleb’s soul and spirit, but “a belief that the projects on which I set my heart are *possible* even when they prove to be humanly impossible to carry through” (Hannay xxxiii). In simple terms, what I am saying is: I *will* follow him. And *I am* following him.

In these new, empty hours, under each howl from me that hovers and above each lurch of me that lands upon the floor, with an absurd order to follow him, I could only seem to be one thing: *reach*. Kneeling on the floor, it seems that I send my heart off to realize itself, as a new form—made new beyond the known and within the unknown—in *the unlimited capacity to love him now that he is no longer here*. And so it begins, here, now, with sound. As I howl, I vow to dismiss the order of dignity—to do whatever is required to reach him. As I move against the floor, the posture I take is the posture of promise—a life lived, possessed by a promise of kept. In this way, living is not a promise made, it is a promise kept. To my former self, I am remade—no, kept—as a fool. I confess: I am a fool. What’s more, in this promise to follow him, I profess to lead a *seemingly* foolish life of everlasting love. I am emptied of everything. The self I knew myself to be before I knelt

down is now gone. I am only the sound and movement of this reaching. Whether I kneel, sit, stand, leap or fall, I am a nothing but this gesture of reach. As the incomprehensible divine, I reach. As a comprehensive human, I stoop. I am emptied. I am full of yearning. It is a *felt* paradox to be emptied by the fullness of desire—to first reach beyond the last bend. Simply put, as I kneel in lucidity, I madly reach for divinity. And, although I don't know it in so many words that night, except by sheer sense of *feeling* it, this reaching is a clear intention. Because, as an intention, it aims to go in as deep as it goes far, this devotional intention is a deep-reaching, far-reaching directive from the heart and the will—to unite with Caleb-as-Spirit. It is devotional more than it is emotional. From this day forward, I know devotion, which another, with an untrained eye *or* heart, may too easily confuse as an odd expression of emotion or eccentricity, but what is not easily discernable by or acceptable to the untrained eye or heart, and what is quite simply beyond normal perception is an active expression and gestured life of reverence—for the real. Reverence is a rare activity. It is a vital force in the gestured life.

This is the intention—set. It is decided *by* feeling—with fortitude. I *will* follow him. And I *will* reach him. And so, I died too. Born again, I am reach, itself. Caleb's body is upstairs in the ward. Moved by something beyond reason, with one glance back, I walked away from his body. I let go of his body. And, now, I reach. It is his spirit that I will not give up. Never. I refuse. So I reach. I *reach*. And I *reach*. In a word, this is how I understand the feeling. A feeling of absolute range, a feeling of out-and-out extension, a feeling for freedom from futility, this reach is rendered as reverence—except for the realization of it in form. What does “reach” mean in terms of how it moves me and changes me? In order to approach this question, I reach out from Michael Foucault's ground of understanding of the



transcendental as the play—and work—of forms that anticipate all content as though it is already rendered possible (Malabou 36). Within this gestured life of reach, I live in a realm of possibilities. I am an advocate for possibilities.

At one point, I turn around to see both of my sisters-in-law sitting on a bench. Their faces, as they look back at me, are reshaped by awe for what they see coming from me and for what they feel for me: deep respect for my love for Caleb. It is everywhere that night; reverence is all around us. And although I am the one to perform it on the floor, this ritual of reverence is as impersonal as it is personal. *I am doing it for all of us.* Many months later, my mother tells me that she wouldn't let anyone—not the nurses, not the counsellor, not family even—approach me. "Let her be," she said; more than once, she tells me. My mother knows me. She knows that *total* space, for me, is sometimes the most perfect embrace. Within her pain, she took care of me, in mine, simply by knowing me—the true me, which is *exactly* who is alive on the floor this night that Caleb died. Hers isn't a protective embrace so much as it is a mother's active expression of reverence for her child to do what she needs to do, to be what she needs to be, freely—and without interference or judgment. And, once reverence is realized, it is too powerful to be interfered with—or judged; if detached, selfless honesty is accessible. In time, what I come to know is what they all see, regardless of what they understand or not: the remaking of my will.

Why reach? It is the gesture of reach that realizes a new extraordinary life. It is a life lived with conviction. When opened by this significant loss, I, as in the self, become negated by a positive, permanent void that permits pure spirit. It is realized as presence. It is *felt* as

presence. I am presence. This is who I am. This is how I am. And, it is positive because although it is negating in terms of the experience of refusal, it is entirely life affirming in the surrender. With awareness of this void, as a space within me to be used to connect me to something beyond me, life, as I know it, is to reach—beyond the self. In this negation, I now live the insightful life that contrasts ignorance—the opposite of reach. We may then receive a new purpose and practice that connects us to the world again. This is how I understand it: the illumination that streams into me on that night holds me open—entirely open—free from the contracted posture of ordinary life to a new, expanded way of life. I am stretched beyond recognition. The reach lives on in me and through me, which is how I know this refusal, that surrender, this giving of myself over to the floor, and that giving of myself over to that perfect sound made to equal this perfect love for Caleb. And that ceremony, it can be called nothing else but a ceremony, is later realized to be this insight of transformed love. It is an open secret that requires simple *reverence*—from self and others—in order to be of any use beyond personal delight in support of universal purpose.

On this night, it seems that, for me, the ordinary capacity for love is transformed into an extraordinary, radiant reach—to realize the full scope of the sacred, to go as far as possible—and beyond. And so, throughout this ceremony, as I breach with crescendo and mark a new agreement for a life committed to spirit into the floor, I am reach. I simply open. And even though, I will slightly close again, from time-to-time, I close only so that I can open more than before. I confess: I am a human being. I hope I will be believed. Should there be any evaluation, it is the heart that must conduct a test for veracity, as the heart alone knows how the mind merely keeps score on human performance and progress—and

more so, in the way of fixing for failure. It is only the heart that can lift up our shared humanity once it lets us down. And the wonderful aspect of the true nature of this reach is revealed in the felt recognition that it is the work of the unbreakable spirit and heart.

With arms stretched out, with hands open and empty, it is with true openness that we are poised to give and receive the most ultimate affection. Now, with the knowledge of this new ground, with a flourish for what it is to be forgotten within the surest sense of forever, as I do seem to make the real and right sound, as I do seem to go outside the walls, through the ceiling and beyond the roof, as I do seem to follow him, I realize that I am only knowable to myself by this new lucidity for and capacity to reach for what is real—a gesture of realization itself. My life, now, is this gesture that does not come from me; it is a commitment to humanity and a response to the divine signal—that is not accessible by intellect.

Meanwhile, I call out for patience and reverence not for myself—alone—but for the realization of *our* highest human potential: love. *It is limitless love—for all, not for separate selection.* It is to act with higher knowledge that to harm one is to harm all, and to heal one, is to heal all. This higher knowledge—by grace—contrasts the much lower utilitarian model, which is to use one in order to help many. It will not do.

And so, with this higher knowledge, in going beyond my mind, in following him with my heart, I leave my *self* behind on that floor. Now, here, on this night and every day and night after, as spirit, I am the reach—with unbreakable commitment. I am nothing but the reach. I am realized as the reach. And, because I am now *housed* in full realization, no *real* harm can come to me in this reality.

The next day, early in the morning, with my body, with the alertness of absorption itself, I reach beyond myself to be whatever my seven-year-old niece needs. On the grounds of Canuck Place, chasing one another through a spectacular scene of pebble walkways punctuating a lush landscape of flowers, ferns and bushes, by running through them, we tear holes in the small pockets of privacy holding beautiful benches built for brooding. With some protective endurance at work, my niece appears to keep moving in order to not be caught herself by that which she doesn't understand: death. And so, all morning, I move with her through the mourning that chases us both. We allow the next-day-version of ourselves to be free to explore the soft, intuitive mechanics of the playground designed for children of all abilities, to be in an embrace with an enormous oak tree with our fingertips pressing into the bark as we hug it, to be wrapped in the cool September air that dampens our clothes and chills our cheeks and noses, and to be nourished by pancakes and syrup from the breakfast offering prepared by someone much more than a cook and but no less than a nurse.

Later that morning, together and separately, we all leave Canuck Place. And who are "we"? Each of us holding the other with care within our thoughts of Caleb and his relationship to each of one us, we are five separate vehicles filled with family members, all heading in the same direction toward what can no longer be considered home. We are homeless, essentially. But, as a procession, we drive on, together. On my own, in a white Ford truck, I get lost trying to get out of Vancouver so I surrender myself to a parking lot where I sit crying until I can finally get my tears to flow in direction of my sisters-in-law who sit together in a black Volkswagen sedan and wait for me at a gas station as I find my way. Once I am back on track, with their car right in front of me the whole way out of

Vancouver and over the Coquihalla Highway, I don't have to navigate the blurry way out and away alone. Following my time on the floor, when I just willed myself to follow Caleb, this simple, physical act of following is exactly what I need while my personal will reforms and clarifies. I can simply follow them the rest of the way back to Kelowna.

In Kelowna, my oldest brother meets me at our sister's house. We arrange it so that the family does not have to walk up the temporary wheelchair ramp to the front door. We are careful to not take anything more away from them for their return. We do, to the best of our ability, cleanse the house of hospital equipment and any other obvious implements of hopelessness and heartbreaking limitations. Meanwhile, my other brother prepares what both brothers gathered earlier for us to eat once we get back from Vancouver.

In this chapter, in reference to the "New Catholic Encyclopedia", as an attempted approach, I relate this personal, transcendental experience and notion of *reach* to Aristotle's metaphysical concept of *entelechy*—a term from the Ancient Greek word *entelecheia*, combined as the Greek words *enteles* (complete), *telos* (end, purpose, completion), and *echein* (to have). In his discussion in *Metaphysics*, Aristotle recognizes the term *entelechy* for how it distinguishes *potentiality* from *actuality*. There is *both* potentiality and actuality in the luminousness of reach as soon as one realizes oneself as the reach one transcends potential to actualize it.

In outward expression, *the reach* comprises three simple acts; the first act is to *reach as reverence* for the soul of another. Inwardly, I am focused beyond what is given to the usual sensibilities, in the way of loss, with a inner musculature made for a lifetime of yearning, in

order to, by reach, take possession—by way of the will, as the second act—of what seems impossible: union, with Spirit, as the third act.

And so, in surrendering to a symbol so as to be carried away by it, as a promise kept, not made, I will leave the lamp out in the open to set a tone of reverence. I will leave the lamp on for all souls. I will leave the lamp out until the last family member leaves the house to go home to spirit as spirit itself. I invite you to develop a ritual of reverence for your own soul and the soul's of others. Through each loss, in all that it takes to keep going through loss after loss, I intend to meet my soul and your soul at the level of spirit. In this way, in loss, as loss after loss cuts into my soul, as loss after loss burns into my being, I will put pain to work. This is my design. I will put pain to work in spiritual service of the highest expression of love capable of transforming oneself, others and one's community in loss.

### Chapter Three: The Epiphany

There is a lot to do. Today, we will arrange and prepare for Caleb's funeral, which will take place on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. Early in the morning, on Monday, September 26, before Shelley and Calvin come to pick me up to help with making arrangements with Everden Rust Funeral Services and Pastor Jack at Trinity Baptist Church, I go into work to answer some emails and check in with my manager, the owner of the media firm. Unseen by everyone except the administration assistant at the front desk, I slide through the slick lobby, with its white leather couches and orange accents, upstairs to my office. On my desk, next to my computer, a sympathetic card and carefully arranged bouquet of flowers allow me to get to work and not feel as though I need to file Caleb's recent passing away in my desk until I leave work. After I answer the emails, I walk past the empty boardroom and the production room—the green screen is not on so no productions today—to the design room to say hello to the team and the owner and manager, Rachael. From inside the design room, turning around to see me in the doorway, as her soft, liquid blue eyes begin to spill, Rachael pours toward me—to soak me in an embrace. I raise my hand slightly to stop anything from flowing. She goes from liquid to solid. "Thank you for the flowers; they're beautiful," I say, as though conjuring up the flowers to arrange them right there between us—an impermanent, leafy, soft-petalled barrier. Standing back, Rachael is a now vase of understanding—ready to receive my arrangement. This is work. I need to keep it together. That's how I arranged it. I will speak with her in private in her office, as I do at the end of every workday, where something may flow or bloom—to be added to what is already arranged. I must also arrange to say thank you, again.

*"If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough." —*

*Meister Eckhart*

One night in August, about a month before Caleb's death, my sister asked me to go out with her. Other than my trips to and from work, none of us go out anymore unless we have to, but I can see in her eyes that she needs to begin to think about and talk about funeral arrangements, and she can't do it at home. After she talks about what she knows is typical for burials and funerals, based on what the funeral director told them, as this relates to what she wants, she says, "I don't know about speakers. Who *could* speak?" She is so defeated by facing and fighting too many truths in such a short time. "I can. I will. I will write and read a eulogy," I say. She doesn't want me to unless I feel as though I truly can, as she says she cannot begin to imagine how difficult it would be. But I just know I can do it. I am a promise kept.

Working with an outline and some notes, after Caleb's death, I begin the eulogy titled, "Eulogy for Caleb: A Wholehearted Life." *Thank you. Thank you all for coming here today to cherish and remember Caleb David Blair Lanz. My name is Jody Collins. I am Caleb's aunt—and Avery's aunt too. Hi Avery. And I have the absolute honour to write some words and speak about your amazing, loving, imaginative and courageous son, grandson, brother, nephew, cousin, student, patient and dear friend.*



At Everden Rust Funeral Services, in a meeting with a funeral director to go over the arrangements and service, we learn about what to expect in response to the family's wishes, and *what I can do* to help becomes quite clear: point out the need to edit out "in vain" from the memorial card. We, my sister, her husband and myself, all agree to this edit and change, but, for me, because I am now nothing but *a promise kept*—not made—I *know* that Caleb did not die "in vain." *At The Ronald McDonald House, in the early days, Shelley and I would take a break in the evenings from our research—our quest for a cure—to play Trivial Pursuit and I can't help but notice the irony in that activity: a distraction of trivial facts to face the hardest fact of all. There is no cure.* Within a most *intimate* success, within a perfectly private realization, I know I am nothing but the result of what I reach as reach itself. I am When we cannot actually touch what we reach for we become reach it self. On this day, simply put, reach is revealed as influence in service of what is true: Caleb did not die "in vain." Most immediately, in service of the truth, in our collective loss, I will realize this result in how I exalt Caleb. In service of all of us who loved Caleb, I will realize this result in how I exalt the family and the community—the human family, that is. How will I do that?

Going back to the night when Caleb died, going back to the night when I did not leave but I had to go, going back to the night when, without yet having the words to know it, I realize that I *will* "follow him," going back to the night when, without yet having the words to know it, I realize that as "reach" itself I *will* reach him, and going back to the night when, in performing a ceremony on the mansion floor, as an act of reverence, I realize that, in the remaking of my personal will, I *will* unite with Caleb—with Spirit. In revisiting the night

Caleb died, with the purpose of moving the realization, as the possession of Love's logic, forward, I know that three acts are required to make the impossible possible. In review, outwardly, this reaching comprises three simple acts; the first act is to *reach as reverence* for the soul of another. Inwardly, I am focused beyond what is given, in the way of loss, with an inner musculature made for a lifetime of yearning, in order to reach the divine and surrender my will, as the second act—of what seems impossible: *union*, with Spirit, as the third act. Following Caleb's death, I work to exalt family, friends and the community.

*The first act is reverence*

After meeting with the funeral director at Everden Rust, we go to the church to see Pastor Jack. Seemingly ordered by a higher order, the office setting we meet in is quite unlike most offices, as there doesn't appear to be anything—people, stationary, greetings, furniture, gestures, wall hangings, exchanges, etc.—there that isn't actually needed to provide a service of some sort. There is a simple, guiding intelligence that directs the purpose and activity of the office. When we sit down, Pastor Jack goes through the structure of a typical funeral only, with slow, deliberate movements, he unfolds a perfectly pressed, folded acknowledgement that Caleb is a child. Judging by the deep creases between each pressed phrase, this is a white cloth he clearly doesn't unfold and hold open often. When he speaks of his part, I hand him some pages, a printout sourced from a theology website about the story of Caleb in *The Bible* (New Oxford Annotated Bible, Num. 13:1-14:38; 26:65; 32:11; 12; Deut. 1:34-38; Josh. 14:6-14; 15:13-19). In the first few weeks of his diagnosis with “a bump in his brain”, a euphemism used so that Caleb could say it as it is in his own time, I

searched for something spiritual, something about courage, something reflecting, not only his name, but his character, and something in which to help connect him to his spirit to strengthen him in times of uncertainty and fear. This Bible story of Caleb reflects Caleb's own courageous journey of transcending fear with a different spirit. And so, within a month of diagnosis, one night at the Ronald McDonald House, when he called me back up to his room after we had all tucked him into bed, I referenced this biblical story about Caleb when speaking to him, only eight years old, as he, for the first time, speaks to me—to anyone—about how he is “afraid to die”. In honour of how our Caleb, who, in his own words, “does things the right way, not the easy way”, Pastor Jack used the aspects of the biblical story that reflected Caleb's story to guide his prayer, meditation and benediction for the service. Pastor Jack then asks if anyone else will be speaking. “I am giving the eulogy,” I say.

Once we finish our meeting with Pastor Jack, we go straight home. Located in a subdivision in Glenmore called Wilden Estates, on a corner lot, the light brown and beige house is large, open and inviting with three levels, a two-door garage, a wrap around deck, and a large, expansive yard. It is a house built for family and friends. Nearly as soon as we arrive home, out-of-town friends and family begin to arrive at the house to offer love and support, as my sister and her husband attend to what needs to be done. *My dear sister, there are no words. You and Caleb have a connection so special I cannot begin to find words. The way Caleb looked at you was breathtaking. And, I know now, it takes everything in you to breath.* The majority of family and friends arrive from Prince George, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Victoria, Penticton, Summerland, Toronto, Osoyoos, Vernon, West Kelowna, and all areas from within Kelowna. *In recognition of one of his many special gifts, when Caleb gives you his attention it is like you are the only one in the room, which is quite a*

*contradiction today with so many of us in the room giving and receiving attention in honour of Caleb. What's more, you are convinced that what you have between you, what you created together, and what you shared is entirely new and wonderful.*

Some of Shelley and Calvin's oldest and dearest friends arrive, and my sister, with help from these friends, gets started on the unimaginable task of personalizing the funeral preparations. One of her best friends, Rhea, a photographer, who first came to know the family as a daycare provider for Caleb and Avery designs the slideshow. Two other friends, Nadia and Coni, are instrumental in helping with the obituary, organizing the music, finding Shelley something to wear to the funeral, and assisting with a recorded message of a mother speaking to her son, after his death, which will play at the funeral. The house is busy in support of and with thoughts of Caleb's death, but it is so alive. There is a special sort of human kindness—a *pure quality of being*—that is expressed as confidence in what to do in a time of not knowing what to do. This quality is self-giving within a situation that no one could know what to do. It is amazing to witness and see this pure knowing at work as friendship, as a symbolic yet visible embodiment of generosity and commitment.

Because I cleared my desk at work, I can stay home to continue to write the eulogy, in private, in my room in the basement. This is the perfect level in which to reach within in order to raise Caleb, the family and the community. It is quiet. And I am alone. This is all I need. A guestroom, my bedroom is not small, and even with two large dressers and a bedside table, I have room for my desk. Still, I sit in my bed to write the eulogy. Next to me, I have an outline and a stack of notebooks filled with notes about happenings, imaginings and things Caleb did and said over the past 20 months. I have a lot to work with. I have a lot to work for.

In hearing the familiar sounds and continuous motion of a hand “thump” against a wall to “click” on a light switch while little socked feet “shuffle” up to my closed bedroom door, my fingers freeze above the keyboard, and I wait for the “knock” and the soft voice that give a new start to my tireless heart every evening, “Aunty Jody? Can we go for a walk?” *Avery: When you were four years old, you grabbed my hand and said to me, “Wherever you go, I go.” Caleb will go where you go. He is with you—always. At The Ronald McDonald House, when asked about what he wants for his Make-A-Wish, he replies, without hesitation, “All I want is for my sister to be here,” as you, who had a cold that wouldn’t seem to go away, were not allowed to come to a house with kids on medicines that suppressed their immune systems.*

“Come in, sweetheart. I am ready to go!” I say. Together, we get Libby, the miniature, black and tan Dachshund, and head out for our evening walk. When we round the corner and begin our ascent up the steep hill, Avery says, “It’s dark. We can see Brian.” Wilden Estates is a massive subdivision, which is still in development, and we usually walk for a few hours—in part, along the sidewalks, in part, off-road and into the light bush, and in part, in the more forested section where there are two small lakes, called Hidden Lakes. In this section of our journey, we deepen our mystery while we expand our imaginations, so as to integrate the unimaginable into our being. A few months ago, when I worked to help Avery express her thoughts and feeling about anticipating Caleb’s death, with our imaginations, we claimed a sort of guardian, within the neighbourhood street lamps. We imagined the light in the lamps to watch over us as we walked. Imagining that this guardian travelled along side us as we walked, jumping from lamppost to lamppost, Avery named the guardian light, “Brian.” Because our walks are most certainly alchemical, integrating the

conscious and the unconscious, these are acts of “active imagination” (*The Collected Works of C.G. Jung: Alchemical Studies* 106). Jung writes, “the vision is the thing sought,” which allows Avery, at the age of seven, and me, for her sake, to imagine an omniscient guardian who shows up for her, who is concerned for her, who goes everywhere she goes, who watches over her, who cannot die—and leave her. Brian is certainly not a replacement for Caleb, her big brother watching over her, as she grows, but it helps her to connect to her need for such a presence, which she can find *everywhere* through active imagination.

Meanwhile, in terms of the “corporeal imagination,” which brings supercelestial bodies into form, so to be thought a solid form, I, in solid form, am right there holding her hand. And, for the time being, until we, the adults, reorganize the relationships—to give her parents a chance to adjust and refocus their attention back on the whole family—in body, I am not going anywhere.

*The second act is the remaking of the will*

With an understanding of reverence as a psychological transformation involving a shift from the emotional to the devotional—with a soul set on unity, how is the will involved? Before we consider how the will is involved, let’s first recognize, as Hegel does in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that devotion is “conscious of its act as the act of all alike and as simple being”, which for our purposes means that, as soon as devotion—not emotion—acts upon the will, we reach for unity *as* humility and simplicity (131, 430, 433). If the impossible union with spirit is to be realized, as St. John of the Cross claims, then it cannot

be through “any capacity of desire,” which is an exertion of the soul; it must be as an act of love, realized by reverence, remaking of the will, and unity.

Remembering that the opposite of reach is ignorance, I appreciate how, in *The Perennial Philosophy*, in his essay titled, “Beliefs”, Huxley writes, “We don’t know because we don’t want to know” (9). Ignorance can be overcome. Ignorance is often deliberate. It is the will that decides what we know, which for individuals who “detect no meaning in the world,” it is more convenient or normal to be willfully or willingly ignorant—until the abnormal, devotional will “casts a revealing light upon the normal”—to reveal the willfully ignorant normalization or normlessness of anomic, deliberate acts of ignorance (*The Perennial Philosophy* 9). And so on. *A short time after his diagnosis, Caleb called me to his room at The Ronald McDonald House to talk. He told me he was afraid of dying. At one point, I told him that I would take his fear and sadness away, if I could. He asked, “What would you do with it? I don’t want fear and sadness to spread to others.”*

It is September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011. With the funeral less than two days away, as soon as I feel as though I have a solid draft of my eulogy, I go upstairs and into the kitchen where Shelley, Calvin and a friend are talking. I ask them if they wish to hear it and tell me about any changes they might want me to make. Walking quickly out of the kitchen towards the garage, Calvin says, “I don’t want to hear it now. I know it will be really good. I want to hear it for the first time at the funeral.” *Calvin: You know Caleb said it best when he talked poker, so we know he would say, “Dad, with you, I’m all in.” With you, he didn’t hold his cards back. For you, there is no worse deal, no greater loss than to have a son only to be cheated when he*

*is taken from you, a lifetime too soon. But you love him like you are winning him even when the chips are definitely down. Caleb got the deal of his life in having you as a dad. As a man who loves his family with complete devotion, you are a man who showed him that when his son—or hockey—needs him, he is there for every single goal or penalty from the drop of the puck (silent pause) until the final buzzer. Caleb loved you no matter the score.* The kitchen light is warming yet dim. The heat from the dishwasher adds to the warm-heartedness of the house. I read my eulogy to Shelley and her friend, Lil, who is here from Prince George.

It is early September, and we know Caleb will die soon. Shelley and Calvin are out meeting a funeral director for the first time to make arrangements. *And Shelley and Calvin, as parents you not only faced a brutal, unimaginable, devastating loss, you also faced a world with all its pettiness, its half-heartedness while you worked to create a lifetime for your son in a look, in a hug, in a moment, in a day, in an uncertain amount of time that fell away rapidly.* While his parents are out, I am home alone with Caleb. It is a day with nearly unnoticeable weather. With a low, unremarkable, cloud ceiling, no precipitation, no wind, and no leaves yet falling, we are suspended between seasons so it seems we need to create the sense of one for ourselves. In order to begin to make a season, a home for our souls on this most empty day, I refer to a private, very short list of things I want to share with Caleb before he dies. On that list is poetry. When we first learned of his terminal illness, I told myself that I wanted to help him know himself before he left this world. This opportunity together reminds me of an earlier conversation, a profound moment, and an insight and awareness that Caleb shared with me one night, the Christmas before, nearly a month before we learn he is terminally ill. While he brushes his teeth, he tells me, as he points around bathroom at



all the inanimate objects and declares with a raw, burst of fresh joy, “These things don’t know life. We are so lucky to be alive!” *There is nothing more wonderful than to watch him make an imaginative leap. Because he was so intelligent, the days of “Caleb, that’s called a pinecone” very quickly became “Caleb, that’s called an epiphany”.*

And so, in honour of this precious time together, before we select some poems to read, I read an excerpt from Herb Gardner’s play, *A Thousand Clowns* from a book recommended to me by a wonderful bereavement counsellor from the Okanagan Hospice Association to help me in my efforts to support my self and my family through our loss—and the incredible challenges set upon us as a family. In the play, the protagonist, an uncle, *refuses* to release his nephew to child-welfare authorities, and even though there isn’t time or opportunity for my nephew to do what the author declares, I read as though it is a declaration of my own:

*I want you to know exactly the special thing you are. I want you to stay awake. I want to be sure you see all the wild possibilities. I want you to know it’s worth all the trouble to give the world a little goosing when you get the chance. And I want you to know the subtle, sneaky important reason why you were born a human being and not a chair.*

With an open expression, with a round face like a cherub, he quietly says, “I feel like a chair.” Without expression, I rest my gaze on him like a blanket, and we sit in silence. I try to imagine it. We are two chairs stacked upon two chairs—a tall chair and a wheelchair. In reading the passage from the play, I know it seems cruel to read such a passionate testimony when it is not possible for Caleb to even consider let alone do, and I want to declare my wishes with hope that he will open up to me and share with me what he is thinking and feeling. I say, “Tell me what it’s like to feel like a chair.” Although it is difficult

for him to make speech, he speaks like a poet, as though reaching around himself, his chair-self, to find the words for this newly felt form. For the rest of the afternoon, after we recognize that we are chairs, we realize a most intimate season for our souls—together. This is our season. It is one season. We decide the weather. Whether we decide on animals, trees, flowers, and so on, we give it life. And although it is not winter, our season, Caleb wants snow. He wants to write a poem about snow, but first he wants to hear a poem from the book that waits on the kitchen counter where we sit. Over a year ago, I bought the book for him on sale at Munro's Books. Organized in sections by the four seasons, the book, with its vain title, is called, *Stories and Poems for Extremely Intelligent Children of All Ages* by Harold Bloom. With our bodies as chairs, as we each give ourselves up to be a seat for our silent souls in order to contemplate a season of our own, we turn to winter. In respect of Caleb's own herald's call, as the earthly screams, here, and as the heavenly silences, gone, I read, Walt Whitman's "The Mystic Trumpeter".

Blow trumpeter free and clear, I follow thee,  
 While at thy liquid prelude, glad, serene,  
 The fretting world, the streets, the noisy hours of the day,  
       withdraw,  
 A holy calm descends like dew upon me,  
 I walk in cool refreshing night the walks of Paradise,  
 I scent the grass, the moist air and the roses;  
 Thy song expands my numb'd imbonded spirit, thou freest,  
       Launches me,

Floating and basking upon heaven's lake.

On the night Caleb died, while I moved against the floor, without a language to understand what is working on me, I embodied or symbolized this realization by way of the body—to evoke the philosopher and biologist Hans Driesch's understanding of entelechy that recognizes a subtle, physiological intelligence in deliberate acts of the will. And yet, by way of the body, then by going beyond the body and the mind, and finally by way of the heart, I also realize that I set my heart on a project: to make the humanly impossible possible. The realization of this project is something that I just know to be not only possible, in potential, but also to be actual—to be realized as real. On that night, I die too. And I am reborn to serve what is actual in being actual.

*The third act is union*

It is the morning of September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Three days before the funeral, the house is full. I am alone in my bed. Surrounded by notebooks, past organizing the sections of the eulogy, as segments of anecdotes, quotes, and recognition, I am now writing notes some of which will go into the main document—the eulogy. It is an act of reverence. Sitting cross-legged in my bed as I write the eulogy, I am not prepared to receive what comes to me.

*I write: Caleb: I have lost a friend for life, but through my connection to you in life, through illness, dying, and finally, in death, I have gained some real perspective about what living means—it means to live with wonder; to live with courage; to live with joy and laughter; and*

*most of all to live with my whole heart. This gift from Caleb will keep me connected to him, linked to living, and so through losing him, I will now find him everywhere.*

Suddenly, it comes to me: the whole truth. It comes to me as truth in total.

“And so through *losing him*, I will now *find him everywhere*.”

I am still.

“And so through losing him...*I will now find him everywhere*.”

I am silent.

“And so through losing him, I will now find him *everywhere*.”

I am not there. I am everywhere.

I might be repeating it as a prayer. I don't know. But *I do know* I am testing it, for truth. Is it possible to parse perfection? I take the phrase—that are no longer single, separate words anymore—deep inside and feel them, the wholeness, and as soon as I move them within, almost expecting to lose them within me, I seem to find them without me—to *be revealed as everywhere*. Is it possible, in time, the epiphany will perfect as a reflection of perfect union with the divine.

How can this be? It is a felt-truth. It is not rational, but it is real. I just know it. How? I have no idea. In losing him, I ... find Him Everywhere. Is it my “will”? Coming to me as the epiphany, the complete *knowledge* comes as complete *being*. In this sense, the personal will does nothing. I didn't *will* it. I simply know it. I simply am it. I didn't will it; as in make it happen. I simply *declare* it as it happened—suddenly! And yet, it brings both a state of

surprise and calm. It is a message that is revealed—all at once. It is not a making—by me. It is a heralding. I am a herald whereby “I” am the instrument—as a trumpet—who “will,” as declaration, give way to the Divine Will and not my own.

If it comes to “me,” the epiphany, without my willing it, with Caleb as a symbol, did “I” lose and find him or Him? I will find “Him,” as in God, in losing “him”, as in Caleb. In this way, suddenly, with illuminating, mystical power, in losing Caleb, I find and am united with God.

It is impossible for the will to attain to the sweetness and bliss of the divine union otherwise than in detachment, in refusing every pleasure in things of heaven and earth (86).

St. John of the Cross

When we receive revelation, we do possess it, and it possesses us, and *we need time to grow into the knowledge*—to mature within what it is, as Truth.

The eulogy I write for Caleb ends with an epiphany, and my life begins with *the epiphany*. In form, I am now *the epiphany* made manifest. The epiphany comes as feeling though the feeling is a feeling of wholeness as clarity rather than affection. I am deeply affected.

According to Simone Weil, the “experience of the transcendent: this seems contradictory, and yet the transcendent can be known only through contact since our faculties are unable to invent it” (*Gravity and Grace* 121). Being so simple, the epiphany possesses depth itself, entirely. The vastness is so clear it is simply near so as to be possessed as Presence, as a

promise *kept*—not made. Following Caleb's death, knowing I *will* follow him, knowing I *will* reach him, as reach itself, as a declaration of the devotional will.

For quite a while, I focused on "I." And so though losing him, *I will* now find him everywhere. I focused on the wrong word. It is "will," as in "to declare," not "will," as in "to make happen!" This is the final completing insight in this mystery of "losing-to-find".

The remaking of the will, then, is simple: to say what is, as it is. There is no need to will it, want it, force it, to desire it, to make it to be any other way than as it is. This is a sort of perfection. I am a promise *kept*—not made. I am kept by the will not of my own making. This is the final logical connection within the epiphany. It feels beautiful. It is a revelation within the epiphany. I will declare it: it is beautiful.

At the church, on the day of the funeral, from minute to minute, as I direct my eyes to the inside of my mind and body, I watch as I change my mind into a net. I watch and I wait for butterflies, but none come. I feel not one flutter inside me. In the days following Caleb's death, the newness, the quiet vitality, the serene conviction, the wholeness, I feel continues to reform me. I welcome it. I surrender to it. I am carried away by it. I seem to be purified. It is as though all the nerves in my body have gathered into a single conduit to Caleb—to Spirit—to everyone and everywhere. With this peace inside me, it is as though I am somehow I, myself, am set aside, but still so *very* alive. I am calmness itself. I am completeness itself. I am stillness itself. With each inhale and exhale, what moves inside me is a neutral, direct knowledge of astonishment itself. It is surprising. It is poised. From the

inside out, I hold myself as reverence itself. I watch all of what is inside of me and outside of me with neutral delight.

After Pastor Jack greets us, I go looking for the children, Caleb's friends to ask them a favour, to involve them in a way I think will be meaningful to them—to all of us. Gathered in a little wing of the church, I find them all together. *Caleb loved to inflate a flat conversation with the question: Did you know? In that spirit I will tell you about Caleb's wit, intelligence and humour. Did you know that just over a week ago he wrote his last joke: "Why didn't the chicken cross the road?"* The children need a special opportunity—a voice—on this day to voice their courage, as his friend, in their loss, as symbolic continued companionship with Caleb now that he is gone. The community needs to know, in his own words, that even at the very end, he showed courage through humour. *[Within the congregation, waiting patiently in their seats in the pews, waiting for their chance to participate, as I invited them to do, 15-20 of Caleb's friends shout out the punch line]: "He is too chicken!"*

The children in the community are the ushers—the shepherds—for the service. And, today, on the day of Caleb's funeral, with everyone in their seats in the pews, friends from school, friends from family relationships, and cousins, as the pallbearers, guide Caleb's casket—designed to look like a heavenly white cloud because no one needs to a child in a wooden box—through the open doors into the heart of the church, down the arterial aisles, and up to what will be front and centre in our hearts: our connection to Caleb, as the stillness within, as the thoughtless, formless presence.

I walk down the aisle to the front row where we, Shelley, Calvin, Avery and I will be sitting. To the right, smiling at me with tear streaming down their rounded cheeks, I see two of my friends, Angela and Jillian, who flew from Victoria to Kelowna that morning. I see a few more personal friends, those who don't know the family, but came to be there with me. I sit down next to my sister who immediately grips my hand as though she had looked for it her whole life, but could seize just it only now. Behind me, with friends, family and community sitting in pews, all facing the same direction, all of us gathered to celebrate a life, I know the whole point of life. In front of me, I can see the pulpit in which I will stand to read the eulogy. Pastor Jack gives a welcome, some thanks and a short prayer.

From behind the simple, wooden pulpit, I am perfected—as humility—by a still, clear purpose about what I am doing—and why. I am *the herald* made humble. I look up and smile at family and friends, but “I” am not there. I am only a voice. When I begin to read the eulogy, by somatic feeling, with a particular numinous quality, I notice, in my body, through my nervous system, in tune with my heartbeat, that I am not fighting the full room, as to be expected with this challenge. I am the full room. I am nothing but Presence.

Although the eulogy came to life as I wrote it—alone—its real life is here with Caleb's family, friends and community. And so, I read what I wrote *for them* to them.

*The name “Caleb means “wholehearted” and “faith.” Caleb is our hero. Caleb is our teacher. Caleb is your friend, your student, your patient, your cousin, your nephew, your grandson, your brother, and your son. Caleb is how Caleb loved. In Perennial Philosophy, Huxley tells us, the simplest—most practised—“spiritual exercise is repetition of the divine name” or some*



word or phrase “affirming God’s existence” (277). The sense of repetition seems to be null since it, the word, is new again each time it is spoken. This is love expressed as one word, as a prayer. A revelation in itself, it is whole. And, revisiting Kierkegaard notion of belief that if “affirming God’s existence” isn’t what we need, and our concern is not plain belief in the existence of God rather it is belief, realized as an “exercise of repetition of a divine name or word,” then what we are affirming, in repetition, that the projects on which we set our hearts are possible even when they prove to be humanly impossible to carry through. Today, in community, we celebrate the impossible made possible in what we set our hearts on together. The writing and reading of the eulogy is as much a dedication—in honour of dedication itself—to Caleb, his family, his friends and his community as it is a spiritual exercise. And, in repetition, the word, for what it means, “wholehearted” and “faith” and the divine name are united as one: “Caleb”.

*It is January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010, and without choice or thought, we, family, friends and community, all board a train—a swift, steady train—with nothing but each other on board. We learn right away that DIPG is a speeding train that all of us, family and friends, are on. At once, it is clear to all aboard, that this train is destined for specific stations—each one completely known, but never quite comprehensible until arrival, until we are gripped, like screeching breaks on wheels holding to desperate tracks, by the unimaginable. And yet, because this is no sudden accident, because we are in motion, we stick our heads out the window into the wind—to be blasted by the notion that we get time. Yes. With advanced knowledge he will die, we are given time with Caleb. Yes. We are able to make memories. Yes. We get to see his beautiful smile. But we brace ourselves through terrific landscapes of mountain passage, through blind*

*twists and turns for the day when he won't smile at us again. This is an immense, black ache fueled from within the engine room of our hearts, as we careen toward the last inch of this trembling, train track. Caleb is our only conductor of courage. (Pause)*

*Still, we resist. We fight. We tug at the brakes with all of our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual strength, and we do slow the train for a short time. For a moment, there is hope, a momentary escape from this hurtling train where we find ourselves in a lush, flowered valley. In time, but not much time, we realize this escape for what it is: a dream, a figment of our imagination that billows as puffs of prayer like strawberry smoke from the rusty smoke stack while the nightmare waits around the bend. Again and again, forced off at another station, checkpoints of helplessness clearly mapped out by the progression of the disease, an itinerary of total pain, suffering and death, where no amount of refusal or fight can prevent us from getting back on the train, as it moves towards its end. After each brief stop, we lurch violently into motion, race toward the next station, never losing momentum on the way to the final though unmarked stop. We know that the track will run out. This is a terrifying ride that no family, no friend, no community should have to go on. This is a one-way trip. (Pause)*

*And now, stepping away from the end of the tracks, knowing Caleb is now a perfect passenger in our hearts, we walk in community as togetherness. We now walk forward together. We are family. We are friends. We are community.*

I believe that family, friends and community needed to experience the extreme nature of this journey, together—safely, as I, a trusted voice, depict it through metaphor and read aloud what we all experienced together—so that together, we can know that there is

immense beauty in going through it together. After the passage and the passing, we need a metaphor to reclaim our power—to step away from the unstoppable engine of mortality, to stand again on solid ground, on our own feet, after surrendering our time, our prayers, our efforts and ourselves, so as to be carried away on such a helpless journey.

*With the deepest gratitude, I want you all to know—beyond your own selfless acts to love and support Caleb and this family—you gave this family the most amazing gift. Through your commitment to the fight, in your aim and deeds to carry some of the load, each and every one of you is a witness to Caleb's life. There is no greater gift. There is no greater role.*

Repeating again, as though it is a prayer, Polanyi's beautiful chiasmus: "We do not surrender to a symbol, if we are not carried away by it, and if we are not carried away by it, we do not surrender to it". We surrendered to Caleb, and he carries us away. We surrender to a strong community, and we are carried away by it, together unified and strong. In *Meaning*, Polanyi tells us that perception—sight—comes from the centre of self, but the sight or seeing is not surrendered or carried away because it is not self-centred (74). It is self-giving. The community needs to know that the epiphany came to me so that I could give it to them—as a divine, wholehearted gift (from Caleb, from Spirit through me).

*You loved Caleb in life, and now, after his death, you feel like you lost a friend for life. All I can say to that is, "Yes. You have. You have lost a friend for life, but through your connection to Caleb, in life, through illness, dying and, finally, death, I imagine, like me, you have found some real perspective about what living means: it means to live with wonder; to live with courage;*

*to live with joy and laughter; and most of all, to live with your whole heart. This gift from Caleb will keep you connected to him—linked to living—and so through losing him, you will now find him everywhere.*

## Chapter Four: Parsing Perfection

In the two months after Caleb passes, I feel a continuous sparkling, astonishment, which is reflected back to me as a sparkling winter. Each night, in leaving the house, as I walk, the snowy ground appears to unfurl as an untouched, pure, white sheet of scripture. I step into an eternity of silent crystalline prayers making a return to the deep silence from which they originate. We have snow. Standing still, arms out, palms up, face to the sky, and eyes wide open, as soon as it is written, with a heart and soul for eyes, I read each snowflake as though it is a perfected poem. Just as Caleb did, I need snow. At this moment, snow is all the verse I need. I need the soundlessness of snow to reflect—and befriend—the new, dense silence within me. I move deeply into the winter scene as it, in turn, works on me—all of me, as in body, mind and soul—within the steady snowfall that, like the epiphany, comes to me—over and over and over again—with continuous surprise and poise. Snowfall is continuous surprise and poise. At this time, this is new and unexamined, but it is a permanent sense of astonishment. Within the season of the soul, when the external holds the internal, as it *needs*, the external reflects the internal—wonderfully so. Ushered through the silent snowfall of my mind, I witness my thoughts leave subtle, ephemeral footprints upon a ground of generalized forgetting of particularity. No longer contained as a small snow globe, freed from its once treasured glass domain, my mind is dazzlingly quiet and open. Like the ever-absorbing, white, vast winter sky, I am, as thought, watched by the full moon in absentia—a humble witness who lights and holds all silent skies within a still, neutral gaze. And even though my soul has a season of its own, I need this reality of winter. It is an unusually cold winter, and I walk meditatively with soft yet solid attention on the

frozen ground with cool, bare anticipation of what is to be revealed in the thaw, as the coming season springs into action. But, as for the touch of anticipation, I will reach for no other season yet, as I need to hold this season—as it holds me—now in a way I have never needed a season before now. In beginning a new life, as a promise kept, as a testament to the epiphany, by simple declaration rather than by making it so, now, in losing him, as I find him everywhere, I seem to know no boundaries or form. In moving into the wholeness of each moment, in knowing it so as to articulate it only in the simple doing of it, I go to walk in the winter night without question, but in answer to what I need. I need to be held by something. And I need to be reflected by something. The snow, as an expression of what is impermanent, bound by territory and with seasonal limits, holds me as a human being. The snow, as an expression of what is vast, unlimited and perennial, reflects me as divinity—as a soul. Whether the snow is in motion, whether the snow is still, whether I go to walk, whether I go to run or whether I go to be still, I immerse my *whole* self—so as to peer without thought into the peerless paradox—each and every evening in what is both limited and unlimited. I move between them both so as to be them both. And, because it seems that I must *move* now in order to begin to go—within the next season, that is—to get on with life, *as the epiphany itself*—I go to walk. I go to be alone. And so, in losing him, I go to Hidden Lakes to find him—and myself—everywhere. What is it to find him and my self everywhere?

In consideration of *the gestured life, as a spiritual life of ineffability*, expressed in the metaphors of *following him* and *reaching him*, I acknowledge two modalities of communing or uniting with him/Him, as the convergence of Caleb and God, in transcendence, as with the epiphany, and putting pain to work, as with as more on-the-ground efforts in human

relationship. I think of these modes as leaping and trudging. The epiphany—and so through losing him, I will now find him everywhere—is a *giant* leap! Suddenly, in seconds, I leap and find him and myself to be everywhere: as everywhere itself. I don't know it at the time, but the revelation, felt and depicted as a leap. I don't seem to land for a year and a half. From September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011 until early May of 2013, I seem to soar with no sign of landing. What is this soaring? Briefly, I simply feel, I simply know and I simply am a continuous, still, neutral sense of delight—as though all thoughts and feelings float by without landing in any place of criticism—towards everything, everyone and everywhere. In comparison, this delight is informed by a sense of lightness to contrast the time of mental, emotional and spiritual trudging that precede it. It is the manifestation of ease. This delight could be depicted as though I stand totally naked in front of my former self, only rather than seeming to be missing something, I feel as though I have everything I need inside me, which, in turn, is reflected outside of me. In loss, I am clarified by what I find within—and without.

In practical terms, with just taking flight and not yet landing on new ground, this time requires solitude, silence and structure, which altogether seems to support the new stillness within. To begin, the stillness is realized as a simple routine, which seems to have its own point. I wake up at 5:00 a.m. I shower. I dress. I eat cereal. I walk to the bus stop. I wait. I travel downtown to the central terminal bus exchange. I wait. I travel to The Mission, which is the area of Kelowna where I work as a writer. I walk to a coffee shop. And I wait for the office to open. I walk to work. I begin work at 8:00 a.m. At 9 a.m. I eat a banana at my desk. I keep working until noon. I eat lunch at my desk. I continue working. Then, I eat an apple at 2:00 p.m. I work until 4:00 or 5:00 p.m. depending on the day. Before going

home, I go to see my manager, Rachael. And then, I repeat the bus travel, the waiting and the walking to get home. The simplicity is meaningful. It is purposeful. At home, after I make my lunch for the next day, I often eat alone before the family sits down to eat, so as to give them time together to be a family now that they are a family of three still needing to be a family of four in hearts and minds. After I eat, I go downstairs to read a book or write in my notebook. Then, with or without Avery, I go to walk. With Avery, I walk. Without Avery, I run. Returning home, I go to my room to write before I go to bed—so as to wake up to do it all over again. It never gets old this state of being new. This is how it goes except for one day a week when I go to see Mary Ellen McNaughton, my bereavement counsellor, from the Okanagan Hospice Association. After sitting down with her three times before Caleb died, Mary Ellen suggested, after losing Caleb, I come to see to her every week to help me to find out what is next for me—and to find out where I am going now with all that is new to me.

Regardless of where I am, it is all-new. Only a few months after Caleb's death, a week before Christmas, Shelley, Calvin and Avery leave Kelowna to meet friends in Palm Springs in order to avoid the mercilessness of tradition and to try to prevent unwrapping the unbearable: agonizing memories given, in the past, taken, from the future, and, most of all, gifted, as the present. In the words my sister said to herself and all of us, as a reminder, "the present is called a gift for a reason." Now, she simply cannot go through with wrapping or unwrapping what is present to her. I see that she cannot even look at the present especially as it seems to be happening so effortlessly without Caleb. This is my first Christmas without my sister, which, to me, is unnatural. Seeing not only profound sadness in her eyes, I see tangible betrayal, pronounced as moments, in her every movement. The betrayal she



articulates is biological. A biological imperative, we know that a parent is not supposed to outlive her child, but, as an unnatural phenomenon, it is quite something else to see this sense of unnatural loss expressed in a mother's very being as she moves in space and time. Her every movement, her every word, her every breath she expresses sense of a long-suffering failure. Because it is honest though not exactly open, it is, of course, a most innocent failure. Still, I know that she is not and cannot be who she was before regardless of the time of year. She is new. Whether we are together or not, I am not with my sister. She is changed by this tremendous loss of her son. This may not be rational but it is real for the time being. What is rational is that there is always loss within loss. In terms of priority, the lesser loss—as the loss of being present with loved ones when our longing hearts are set on a loved one who is gone—somehow resembles dissonance or disloyalty to one loss or another. Loss, then, might be most really or deeply felt when it is expressed as irrationality. This is something to respect—to revere—rather than something to resolve. And, since they came into our lives, this will also be my first Christmas without Calvin, Caleb and Avery. This is new. Not quite alone, I stay at the house with three cats and a dog. I don't want to be anywhere else. I want to be right here where I am. Actually, I need just that: to be here, now, and alone. I need to be in what is new *as* what is new.

It seems that in loss, in finding Caleb everywhere, within the promise kept as a union between our souls, I find unity everywhere—as union with the soul of everyone, the soul of everything and the soul of everywhere. Much like how I know the snow, this sense of unity both holds me and reflects me within a continuous blissful state. When the epiphany comes to me, I seem to leap from the illusion of the snow globe to then suddenly find myself

floating in the *real* world—a vast, perpetual state of real snowfall. I experience the world in a much more immediate way. By comparison, before the epiphany, I reflect on life as though I am in a snow globe rather than the realness I now know. And much like the steady snowfall, I am immersed in this state. In this newness, it seems, I must move—as stillness itself—in order to realize what is beneath me. I must move—as stillness itself—in order to realize what is within me. I must move—as stillness itself—in order to realize what is all around me. In each moment, I must move to realize myself *within and as* the total movement of everywhere. Still, because it is so new—and strange—this sense of liberation invites some anxiety. I watch and honour it when I go to walk or run on the ice—a manifest activity to both reflect and express the inner anxiety. Following what is without a doubt, a process of unlearning, deconditioning or self-forgetting, I am preparing myself to touch the ground seemingly for the first time. I will learn to touch the new ground so as to connect to the *real* rhythms of the world, as it is, in the rhythms of here and now, now that I am also gone. The surface of the world is slick. And I need to *develop the capacity* to move within it and across it so as to not slide off once I am ready to go—not leave. In preparation, this is the meditation of walking and running on ice. I am measured in how I place my steps. In preparation, it is a meditation gazing into the snow shrouded night sky. Within each and every moment, it is a moving meditation of reverence for the soul—as reverence for the Soul.

It is February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012. It is now time to go. It is an important distinction: this going rather than leaving. I don't leave. But I must go. After loading up a 26 foot U-Haul truck with all of my possessions, I stand in the living room, an open room for family, friends, and

community, and prepare to say goodbye to my family and some friends. There are no “goodbyes” exchanged, only “thank you.” At last, I put my Russian Blue cat, Lucy, in her crate with a warm blanket and place her between the two seats. I leave the passenger seat open. I leave the passenger seat open for Caleb: the perfect passenger in my heart. And so, together, as wholeness itself, we don’t leave. We just go.

I arrive in Oak Bay at around 10 pm. It is raining. I bring Lucy inside and set her up with food, water and a litter box. Then, leaving the box spring and the wooden bed frame in the truck, I haul the top mattress out of the back of the truck, across the road and into my suite. I throw it on the floor. I will move the rest of my things in the morning. Because I can’t find the padlock for the truck, I drive around the corner and back it into my friend Jessica’s driveway, and up against the house so there is no space between the back of the truck and the house. And because I drove this huge truck over the Coquihalla Highway in the winter, her out-of-town guests look at me like I am from another planet, which I could not contest. I feel as though I am from somewhere other than earth. I am not returning home to Victoria even though, before I moved to Kelowna, I called Victoria home for ten years. Knowing that I am also gone, I am just here, as here it self. Although, by revelation of the epiphany, as a soul remade by spirit, I do know how to be, but don’t yet know how to be here. I believe by what I set my heart on that home will come to me so long as I keep going.

In the first months back in Victoria, I walk, run and get documents together for graduate school. I attend an interview with a dispute resolution firm. Because it is too demanding a position to coordinate with attendance in a graduate program of the same field, I am not hired for the position I apply and interview for, but I am hired as a consultant for the firm. Through the summer, I also serve at a pub and restaurant downtown to save

money for graduate school. Meanwhile, I focus on opportunities to train as a facilitator and coach for the firm.

Between 10 pm and 3 am every night, I walk or run along Willows Beach, a block and a half from my place. I keep going into Uplands. I need to keep going. Practically speaking, I keep going because *it is all I have* as far as life goes. It is all I can do in order to be a promise kept. It is all that I am. With an absence of street lamps on some sections of Beach Avenue, I run into complete darkness until I breach the small hill or come around corner to be greeted by the moonlight. With the sides of the road lined with black thicket, I run down the middle of the road until I see the headlights of cars as they approach. I miss the snow. I miss the silence. I find a version of what snow and silence offer to the stillness within me in the vitality of the green plants and the thick, wet grass. Every night, I run the same route along Willow's Beach and up a set of stairs into Uplands. I stop only to take in the moonlight and give my grief up and over to the earth when I lie down on a sheltered section of the lawn at the same house every night. Taking my shoes and socks off, placing my bare hands and feet in the cool, lush grass, I cry tears into a pool of moonlight that gathers all the blades of grass into one grace and ground that receives me as an embodied question: how am I to be here?

The first semester of school is very successful, which, for me, also involves training as a practitioner in restorative justice. Still, even though I am so entirely delighted to serve out this commitment to my studies, training and new friends, I feel as though something is *stuck* in my body, so I attend a facilitated grief group to see if I can talk whatever it is that is stuck into coming out of my body. In time, this talking leads to a more private expression, which comes to me as a mystery, as I intuit and declare: "Something is happening." This

phrase is an expression of gnosis. The mystery just comes to me. And because it just comes to me, I completely trust it even though I don't know what it is that is happening.

Meanwhile, in my studies, I am confronted by the content of grief felt as a form of stuckness—articulated as impasse as grief. Intellectually, as something to explore, this impasse as grief appeared to be obvious. And yet, externally, there is nothing in my life to suggest that I am in conflict or stuck. Life is going according to plan. Still, as my thinking becomes more penetrating, the impasse somehow feels entirely real. With outside encouragement, I agree that I must not refuse it. And yet, I don't accept the inarticulate content of grief as a lifetime of impasse or a futile finality. It seems I will need to look at the epiphany. I will need to parse perfection after all.

From *The Epiphany*, with ontological attention, I will parse this revelation: *And so through losing him, I will now find him everywhere.*

*What is*

*(Caleb is gone)*

Based on perception, by observation or intuition, this is simply what is real—and true of reality. It is what is as it is without illusion. This truth imperative *is* love. It is direct rather than directing or a directive, as *with, for, or of* love. *Truth is love.*

*What ought to be*

*(Caleb ought to here)*

Is “what ought to be” a moral imperative? In a general way, it could be. In the way of loss, what must be is a matter of longing for what is, what can be, what is not or what cannot be: as experienced by the mind, the heart, and possibly, the soul. “What is” is an existential or

experiential imperative—*for* love. On it's own, even though it is not a judgment, value or prescription for how things must be, without its opposite as “what is”, “what ought to be” is an imperative of longing, desire or necessity in respect of or in relation to a subjective truth or instruction. “What ought to be” is an imperative of bond, desire or duty—*with* love. Respecting this desire or duty bound imperative, in relationship to grief, I have an impasse as grief.

What is   ←                      -----	→ What ought to be
<i>(Caleb is gone)</i>	<i>(Caleb ought to be here)</i>

In parsing the epiphany, I discover an impasse, which to say these two realities, the reality of what is and the reality of what ought to be are in conflict. This is an illustration of impasse as grief. You might get stuck in your grief. This may help you. Now, I can just accept this as an aspect of grief, but what if, based on what I know through the epiphany, we can go beyond these two opposing realities in search of another one—a more complete reality? In the next step of parsing, I find *what will be* as a result of a forced choice between the two opposing realities.

What is   ←                      -----	→ What ought to be
<i>(Caleb is gone)</i>	<i>(Caleb ought to be here)</i>
<p><i>What will be?</i></p> <p><i>(Caleb is gone or Caleb ought to be here)</i></p>	

This forced choice provokes grief as Caleb is either *gone* or as Caleb ought to be *here*. In terms of the impasse, the result of this step is that the impasse is, ought to be and will be grief. Is this acceptable? I don't think so. In *Gravity and Grace*, Simone Weil tells us that “contradiction experienced to the very depths of being tears us heart and soul: it is a cross”

(98). This illustration demonstrates that I am grieving “to the very depths of being” on that impassable crossing. In *First and Last Notebooks: Supernatural Knowledge*, Weil tells us that our notion of mystery is legitimate when the logical, rigorous use of intelligence leads to an impasse: to an inescapable contradiction (131). Furthermore, in suppressing “what is” and “Caleb is gone”, the other position, as “what ought to be” and “Caleb ought to be here”, or the other way around to suppress the latter, is to render the other meaningless, which means that to pose one necessarily involves posing the other. *On the Suffering of the World*, if I am willful in my desire for a to resolve the impasse, I am confronted with pain, which only affects the will and consists in an obstruction, impediment or frustration of the will, which if felt as pain, must be accompanied by contemplation and/or knowledge so as to embrace or transcend the pain (Schopenhauer 9). This suggests that the more I see, the more pain I will feel. Thus, I put pain to work. I find the more joyful state in contemplating contradictions or paradoxes. What if, however, there is a fourth so-called position, outcome or reality.

As a matter or expression of willfulness or willingness, as “what will be”, what is the imperative of the personal will? We may call it the volitional imperative. This then is the volitional imperative—*of love*.

*What can be*

*(And so through losing him, I will now find him everywhere)*

<i>What is</i>	←	-----	→	<i>What ought to be</i>
<i>(Caleb is gone)</i>				<i>(Caleb ought to be here)</i>

*What will be*

*(Caleb is gone or Caleb ought to be here)*

The fourth step offers a fourth, high point on the cross. This is the realm of possibilities. Weil recognizes that the union of opposites—as it relates to parsing the epiphany, in losing, “here” to find him “everywhere”—is achieved on a higher plane. In achieving this higher plane, we transcend the impasse, as a tension produced by our personal will set on two opposing positions, as dynamic a shift—as a refusal to stop, as a promise kept, and accept to keep going—in will between willfulness and willingness. With the will working in service of the higher plane, in accepting “what is” we abide by the divine will—as the universal position—but, in refusing to stop there, so as to keep going, while accepting “what ought to be”, we commit to what we are called to: the realm of possibilities.

Acknowledging Polanyi and the three entelechy acts, if, in reverence for the soul of another, we surrender to a symbol through a will that is not our own, we will be carried away by it—to a final result: union. Although she speaks of accessing a “a higher plane” rather than union through “a faculty of supernatural love”, as a faculty of thought higher than one’s own, Weil recognizes the transcendental to be like a lever, as “the notion of mystery carries thought beyond the impasse to the other side of the unopenable door, beyond the domain of intelligence and above it” (*First and Last Notebooks* 131). It is the heart that reaches above and beyond the mind. This is to say that impasse, in the sense of resolving the mystery of love, cannot be mediated. In *The Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John of the Cross writes, “Divine things and perfections are known as they are, not when they are being sought after and practiced, but when they are found and practiced” (89-90). I understand this sense of found as a practice of contemplation. As an expression of “what can be”, the



result of this step is deeply unconditional. It is limitless. This is the mystical imperative. This is the mystical imperative—as Love. This is direct experience as “what can be”. It is direct perception as Love. In support of this result, the opposite of a life lived or a death done “in vain”, I look to Jan Zwicky, philosopher, poet and scholar of Simone Weil, who says, “Ontological attention is a form of love.”

Relating transcendence to loss, I will keep in mind Foucault’s understanding of the transcendental as the play—and work—of forms that anticipate all content in so far as it is already rendered possible (*Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality* 2016). In the spring of 2013, some time after Caleb died, after allowing his passing to simply work on me, once I begin to dwell on the sacred in the subtlety of each moment, as we can see in the illustration of transcendence above, I do parse the epiphany—even though it feels and is complete and perfect as it is—in an attempt to grasp what immensity is at play within me. Beyond the content of what the epiphany—as a promise kept—not made—actually promises, I need to grasp the immensity in order to be here—and gone—the paradox of being here and gone at the same time relates to the epiphany and, in turn, as it relates to the biblical *being of the world* rather than *being in the world*. This intellectual grasping activity—as a means to relate it to grief and loss—produced an impasse manifested as grief. I acknowledge one concern as such as how to be here *and* gone or how to be here *as much as* gone as it relates to the experience of loss, grief or suffering. I know immediately that the concern involves an ontological commitment rather than an epistemological structure. In other words, it is a self-inquiry expressed as a commitment to being—to being reality—rather than to be satisfied with the knowing of self and reality. In total, after

moving through the veil from a bound reality to an unbound reality, as a witness to and a manifestation of the messenger of heavenly silences and the herald of earthly screams, in going not leaving, in following him, in surrendering and being carried away, as reach itself, and through direct revelation, I realized—as a promise kept—not made—that I am an advocate for possibilities of what is and what is not. In refusing to give Caleb up, I went *with* him—up to a higher plane—by way of the heart in order to find him everywhere—as a soul in the Soul of the world. This is a flight from the ordinary that—as a promise kept—not made—reveals a landing, if there is one, in the extraordinary in what is, what must be, what will be and what can be: sacred.

The parsing of the epiphany—as a mystery—is not in any way meant to provide a result as a model or a prescription against grief; nor it is a model or prescription for a transcendental, “losing-to-find” resolution of impasse as grief (Underhill, “Mysticism, The Nature...” 55). On the other hand, we are appreciating that in order for reality, as “what is,” to be a *complete reality* or a reality of wholeness, it requires the opposite as “what ought to be”—not as a prescription, however—as it is its opposite that *gives meaning*—and possibility—to “what is” as it is. It is “what ought to be” that gives meaning to “what is” and the other way around. Going from Weil’s notion that to suppress one position is to suppress the other position, and in remembering Polanyi’s statement, “we live in the meanings we are able to discern,” we must ask: how can we say that we live in, “what is,” as reality, if we cannot or will not discern the tension between “what is” and “what ought to be” (First and Last Notebooks 131; Meaning 73)?” If we are willing to look at “what is,” then we are immediately compelled to look at “what ought to be.” We must also then be willing to look at “what ought to be” as a tension for how it relates to “what is.” Weil recognizes “justice as

the exercise of supernatural love,” which, in relation to “what ought to be” is how we can bring “what is” to a higher plane—as not only an exercise, but more so as *the just work* of supernatural love (*First and Last Notebooks* 131). Weil also tells us “the fixed point of view is the root of injustice,” which means we must attend to the contradiction, not one position over the other, and we cannot stop at just acknowledging the impasse—as “what will be”—to become stuck within it (*First and Last Notebooks* 270). *We must keep going*. We must—in love—go beyond it. We must transcend it! We must go beyond “what will be” in service of love, in service of possibilities, in service of “what can be”. And so, in revisiting the question in answer to “how to be here,” what can be in terms of finding him everywhere? In combination of the three acts, as reverence for the soul of another, the remaking of my will, and the union with Caleb and him/Him as everywhere, my everyday, mundane experience is transformed into a supramundane, such that all is sacred. If there is a landing in the leap, it is a landing in all that is sacred with the sacred as all. It is to live in the slow reveal with a heart that quickens in the presence of anything as a connection to everything. This is what I call remaining sudden. In the commitment to keep going, in giving the eulogy at Caleb’s funeral, with a sense of boundlessness, I realized “I am the full room.” And now, I walk towards a metaphorical empty room. At times, your emptiness will be visited by desires for fulfillment. Be kind to yourself. Be kind to the thoughts and feelings that visit you in the emptiness. The emptiness is not within you to defeat you in light of what you do not have or hold for your self. It is in you to redeem you. It is in you to free you. In light of acceptance, the emptiness is in you so that you triumph in spirit through what you seem to be denied in the dark. In the dark, distractions of the day will appear. In this darkness, you will abide with longing and love.

## Chapter Five: The Empty Room

One early, spring morning in 2013, as I ready myself to leave the suite I rent in a large, pale, yellow house on Bowker Avenue in Oak Bay to go to class at the University of Victoria, as soon as it comes to me with gnostic import, I declare, “I can’t go into the empty room.”

What is the empty room? And, what is this about going into it or not? It is astonishing, this declaration. It is intuitive. It is emptied of reason. Without forcing any reasonable explanation, over the weeks that follow, I study for academic coursework and, in the time between reading and writing assignments, I write about, sketch and paint the empty room so as to sort of go inside it or prepare myself to go in without being able to say what going in means or offers.

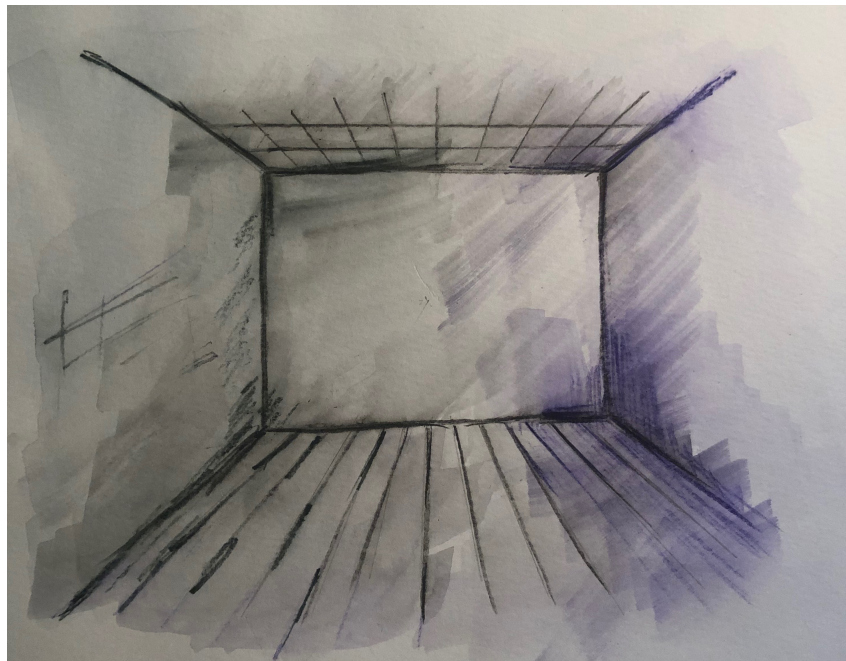


Fig. 1 Collins, Jody. *The Empty Room*. May 2013.

What can be said about emptiness? What can be said about the abyss, the gap, the void? I am aware of a tension between what can be said and what cannot be said about what comes to me as revelation or in what appears to me within the ineffable experience of being in the empty room as emptiness itself. What is ineffability? By experience, it seems that ineffability is what is immense enough to call on silence, emptiness and darkness.

When I am first told by my professor to explore the mysticism, I begin with *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. In a clear expression of the mystical way, the empty room appears as kataphasis, as an affirmative “saying with” through reason, imagination, memory and visualization in the soul’s transformation through loss—and by direct contact with divine spirit. After the appearance of the empty room, in attempting to the empty out the profane conscious content in order to make room for the complete apprehension of the sacred, subtle spirit, an apophasis, as a negation or “saying away”, comes about so as to attune with and attend to the ineffable, experiential nature of being in the empty room. In holding this tension of “saying with” and “saying away”, in sublimating the emerging experience of emptiness with the kataphatic metaphor of the empty room, as a symbolic expression of what it is to be empty as emptiness myself, I accept all forms of loss. I accept “what is” as it is.

The empty room makes room for both the sacred and the profane so as to integrate them in progressing from *how to be* to *how to be here*—on earth as it is in heaven. Through the transformation of my soul by direct experience of spirit and profound loss, I offer a phenomenological account “of that which appears” within my awareness, which deepens and expands my awareness and my quality of being. The continued ontological inclusion of “what is, what ought to be, what can be and what will be” is merely an analytical device to

assist in acknowledging the soul's communion with divine spirit, which results in a deeper and vaster quality of being and knowing—so as to be spirit itself.

A gnostic illumination, an affirmative, kataphatic image, it comes to me as a metaphor. And, as a preparatory, negative, apophatic expression, it comes to me as a refusal when I declare, “I cannot go into the empty room”. It begins with a refusal. In the commitment of a promise kept, not made, I keep going by responding to the refusal with a refusal. I will test the testimony of the empty room by knowing and being emptiness itself. We recall Huxley's adage that knowledge is always a function of being. In approaching the empty room, as an acceptance of the call to go in with the refusal of a refusal, this time of going—not leaving—is quite different from going from Victoria to BC Children's Hospital, from going from Caleb's body after his death to “follow him” as spirit in reaching as the reach of spirit itself, and from going from Kelowna back to Victoria in order to manifest the “losing-to-find” experience of sacred being in being here (Underhill, “Mysticism, The Nature...” 55).

Later that spring, a month or so after I silently declare, “I can't go into the empty room,” I still cannot say what this negative statement and metaphor mean. Still, with intuitive surrender, I trust it. And, when I am told I have a lot of tacit knowledge, I study and trust Michael Polanyi who claims, “we can know more than we can tell” (*The Tacit Dimension* 4). In simple terms, this tacit knowing is intuition. It is “know-how.” In following my intuition, in trusting my soul, in a commitment to keep going, I go into the empty room. With a sort of permission from Polanyi who, in writing *Personal Knowledge*, acknowledges that it is “the act of commitment in its full structure that saves personal knowledge from being merely

subjective,” with total commitment, I go into the full structure of the empty room, as the first wall, the second wall, the third wall, the dark corner of denial, breaking the fourth wall, and a return to the centre in order to live out the spiritual instructions of the epiphany, generate insights and share an experience of loss and mystical emptiness with you, the reader (10).

### Caleb’s Empty Room

Before the emergence of the empty room, during reading break of the fall semester of 2012, I return to Kelowna to visit family. Pulling into the driveway, I look up at the highest gable of the house where, in one of his many superhuman feats of devotion to his family, Calvin has strung up Christmas lights by placing a heavy-duty, professional-use extension ladder into the back of the white work truck so as to reach the highest peak. Similarly, as the epiphany quietly works on me, as I reach a new peak of daring devotion, surpassing any and all levels of uncertainty and fear, my heart knows new heights unreachable from the ground of intellectual understanding. I, too, will need some kind of “white work truck” to support my extension to help me in my reach. For me, not unlike Calvin, this trusted, white work truck appears to be inner trust itself. Now, arriving on the doorstep to surprise her on her eighth birthday, when she opens the door and sees me, in trust, Avery leaps off the ground and lands in my arms with a soft whimper. Whether it is in one jump or in the slow, step-by-step climbing of a ladder, the heart always leaves the ground behind to reach love or land within the groundless ground of a promise kept.



Fig. 2 Avery Lanz (7 years old) at the gravesite of her brother, Caleb Lanz. October 16, 2012.

The next day, I go to Kelowna Memorial Park Cemetery so I can visit Caleb's grave and see his headstone for the first time. Later, after we all have dinner at the house, Shelley and I go upstairs to Caleb's bedroom. Opening the door, I see it: *an empty room*. In this empty room, in going into the emptiness, the loss, that is, there is an absence of meaning, a horror, in the loss of this child. And still, in the commitment to keep going with longing through loss, there is a return to an abundance of meaning and beauty even when the promise of life is broken. And so, in opening the door, *I also see it as Shelley arranged it* shortly after Caleb's death. In the centre of the bedroom, there is a double bed covered with a tan comforter, a green patchwork quilt from Ellison Elementary School signed by classmates and teachers, a green and black patchwork quilt made by an American woman who makes quilts for children with cancer, and Caleb's baby blanket, "Dee-Da." Even though he had this new bed,



I often imagine his bedroom as it was with his first bed: a red-painted, metal bunk bed with two red and blue patchwork quilts in which we used to build forts and from which I whispered, “Merry Christmas, Caleb” the morning I surprised him after arriving late Christmas Eve while he slept. He slept in this new bed very few nights since he needed to be on the ground floor and in a hospital bed.

Hanging on the bedroom wall, there are two white, hard-plastic, mesh radiation masks that hold the impression of Caleb’s face, head and shoulders; one depicts an orca in the design of the Vancouver Canucks; and the other one depicts Mario from the Mario Bros. video game. Also mounted on the wall, there are several autographed NHL hockey jerseys, hockey sticks and baseball bats gifted to Caleb by the players themselves. On the bookshelf are Harry Potter books, small action figures, and many other collectables and gifts Caleb received. One day, in a cumulative response to all the photos taken with superstars, all the free tickets to games and V.I.P occasions, and all the special gifts and privileges he is given, Caleb tells us he wishes to resolve his friends’ politely restrained feelings of envy with the truth: all he really wants is to go to school and be their friend. Compared to true friendship, though well meaning, kind and generous, Caleb feels this attention is quite empty.

With respect and care to not disrupt Caleb’s bed, Shelley and I sit on the hardwood floor. Opening a children’s book, *The Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Suess, she reads aloud a story about harmony and disharmony and sameness and difference, as depicted through the not-so-subtle metaphor of discrimination and division between those Sneetches who are plain-bellied and those who are star-bellied. Eventually, after being taken for all they have by a shrewd entrepreneur who makes a commercial ploy and plot out of the tension between the Sneetches’ differences and desires, the Sneetches turn

adversity into triumph in the realization that they are all the same, each with equal value and equal in rights, responsibilities and freedoms within an inclusive society supported by inherent dignity and daily expressions of gratitude.

Suddenly, as her fine, blond hair hangs like a curtain over a now empty stage of motherhood, stopped by neither rhyme nor reason, Shelley stops reading. She pauses to hold her heart in her throat. After a moment of silence, as though bringing her heart home to her chest, she sighs into the emptiness: Caleb's empty room. Coming from the expanse of emptiness inside her, my sister's sigh expresses what cannot or will not take form in the shape of words or sobs. Although loss is measurable, when living with significant loss, there simply is no expressible form in which grief can take shape or can be given shape. For her, a sigh is the literal language of the heart pronounced by the centre of the body that holds the void left by the incalculable loss of anticipating and realizing all the precious possibilities disallowed by the death of her son. In this sigh, even though her whole being resists, Shelley's body seems to surrender to the reality that this empty room will never be filled with Caleb's life again.

And yet, here we are. Sitting together on the floor of Caleb's empty room, with our hearts held open like a children's book, we hold ourselves open as the promise between the one mother who reads aloud—and sighs into the emptiness—and the one who listens with the tender heart of a child. In loss, there is love in a precious promise relived. In this moment, in the seeing her with eyes and a heart claimed by spirit, I believe Samuel Coleridge's words, "a mother is a mother still. The holiest thing alive." In this empty room, in the promise of a mother reading out loud, there is love in this expression of loss. There is love in this simple act of Shelley being her son's mother.

## First Wall

In these times of going, within each significant movement of what it is to keep going, I say that I don't leave. This time I must leave as I go. This is an important inclusion: this leaving *and* going. And so, in accepting that I must leave the full room in order to go, I go into the empty room. What is the empty room? I don't know. But I must go in. I don't know why I must go. In refusing the refusal that "I can't go in," I know with conviction that *I can go* into the empty room. And I do go in. In leaving the known, I go into the unknown depths of my soul. In *Orthodoxy* (1908), G.K. Chesterton writes, "the mystic allows one thing to be mysterious, and everything else becomes lucid." The one thing I allow to be mysterious is the empty room. I go into the mystery of the empty room, a numinous nothingness, an empty promise of pure, perfect potential in order to reveal the hidden lucidity in a return to the centre of everything else.

You have a good relationship with your conscience. You are willing to look at your self very closely and honestly. You are not afraid of humiliation. Conversely, in regards to humility, like I learned, you will do your utmost best to not focus on the circumstances when the work tests the strength of your spirit, especially if the circumstances seem designed to take everything from you and leave you with nothing. Instead, you will look at your own humanity, your own nature, your own weaknesses, even if you become the lowest and worst of these aspects of yourself in this solemn process of spiritual maturity and loss—to include the loss of what you might know to be the best of you.

This first wall, of course, offers a door—a seemingly senseless yet profound invitation—to go into the empty room. I acknowledge this kind of invitational call to be noetic in nature. Working with the universal metaphors that seem to best express this quality of insight, I refer to philosopher William James’ definition of noetic as a special state of insight needed to look and listen deeply so as to see and hear the direct knowing, inner wisdom or subjective understanding with eyes that peer into deep caverns of awareness and ears that receive subtle tones of truth that appear to be imperceptible to the discursive intellect (The Varieties of Religious Experiences 291). In going through the door of the first wall, I refuse the refusal, which is to accept the spiritual invitation to go into the empty room and turn inward in support of the unification of my psyche—to include the mind, body, heart and spirit. With acceptance of loss, I leave behind ordinary life, as I know it, for the hidden mystery in the empty room as emptiness itself. I go into the unseen and the unsaid.

With an important distinction between Caleb’s empty room, as a real room filled with particulars, and *the empty room*, as the innermost dwelling of the self, which, by nature of entering emptiness is entirely emptied of particulars, I am given to uncertainty and wonder in the awareness of an expanded and deepening outer and inner emptiness designed to take me away from my self with no promise of a return. As a promise kept, I accept that there are no promises in going into the empty room. What is the empty room? The empty room is itself an empty promise. We usually think of an empty promise as something negative, but, with numinous affect, the promise is made empty so as to, as a promise kept, realize something real rather than mere resemblance. Actually, within a noetic commitment, the empty room is the inner work of revealing *what must be* real. For

the soul transformed in communion with divine spirit, as a promise kept, in reaching as reach itself, resemblance will not do. The empty room is a psychic invitation to perfect potential so as to become actual in standing before each wall, in reconciling with the dark corner of denial, returning to the centre and, finally, in breaking the fourth wall.

And so, in leaving the ordinary world to go into the empty room, in an expression of psychic necessity for wholeness, which comes to me with surprising clarity, *I declare three, solemn needs:*

1. *Trust;*
2. *Safety; and*
3. *Silence*

Although it is not uttered in words, as with “trust” and “safety”, the “silence” is stated as silence itself—with a clear, emphatic, silent gesture. Rather than a mere indication, this embodiment of simple silence informs the gestured life of the mystical reach, as the opposite of ignorance, in the embodiment of emptiness. Extremely important, these needs must be met. This is something *I just know*. And so, in declaring them, I trust they will be *safely* supported in the space and time of this mystical inquiry of loss and emptiness, which, by design, makes me both the watcher and the one watched in entering into a great silence and earnest emptiness. The *silent watcher* can only be articulated by a gesture of my hands. Ineffability appears again as a silent gesture, whereby one, dominant hand is held open, neutral and above the other closed-fisted, submitting hand to illustrate how the higher, open hand watches over the lower, closed hand. The higher hand perceives the nature of

others or myself, depicted as the lower hand, expresses thought, feeling, and action. It is the silence watcher that ushers my thoughts, feelings or actions down the aisle to the nave of the church for open reception and neutral or loving blessings. Within a gesture of silence, I can now appreciate—and know—the silent watcher. The appearance of the silent watcher as a gesture reflects the realization of the gestured life: a life of spirit and the ineffable. Still, as soon as it comes to me, as gnosis, by revelatory declaration, I know these three things are absolutely necessary in support of my soul's progress and spiritual maturity. In *The Experience of No-Self: A Contemplative Journey*, Bernadette Roberts, claims that putting aside “the self is a premature laying down of weapons before we know what lies ahead” (49). Although there are several ways to relate to her statement of self-protection and vulnerability, I know Roberts speaks of the level of self that when transcended in service the higher self assists in learning how to be here with unmitigated vulnerability. In other words, it is “an insane risk” to surrender to the higher self too soon.

Now, I want you to pay attention to this very carefully. You must locate or create a spiritual space and time of trust, safety, and silence. You must trust your intuition. You must listen to yourself—your soul, that is. There will be others in your life that cannot conceive of your needs let alone support them, and they will test you, and, even when you appear to fail at times, you will pass this test when you trust your higher soul. In place of “trust, safety and silence,” you might find your own words, but you will need this sovereign space and time for yourself. You will need to protect this space and time with discernment, which is nothing more than a higher trust in your soul and its spiritual needs. Although others may try to convince you otherwise, in the experience of loss of your self, self-preservation is not

an expression of self-interest. It is a necessity in care for your self. Within the uncertainty of this time, in the space of the unknown, this inner trust is your hallowed haven in serene, sovereign silence.

In May of 2013, as I go through the door into the empty room, I feel a sense of tremendous and total loss. Although I refused to say goodbye to Caleb, with noetic trust, I accept an indeterminate sort of farewell to the ordinary world, to family, to friends, to community and to myself. With immediate thoughts of my family, as the first relational expression of what is familiar, in declaring the first steps into the empty room silently to myself, I realize that all that is familiar is now strange to me—including myself. The construct of myself is gone simply because I leave it behind. I am unlearning the experience of relationship as relationship itself. At first, I feel nothing. I just see nothingness as seeing itself. I just hear nothingness as hearing itself. Eventually, when I look at a loved one, an old friend, a new friend, a flower or a tree, an inanimate object, or myself in the mirror, I see a unique yet connecting, still pool of pure, precious possibility reflected back to me. The quality of what I see or hear as clarity itself resonates as a clear seeing or listening without a collection of self-imposed constructs of what I know, as judgment, so as to make a claim, or what I do not know, as fear, so as to struggle with unfamiliarity. With this first realization, as I reach into the emptiness, I feel an angling angst—an ineffable lingering sense of loss—about going home to see family. *I know that I will recognize them, but they will no longer be familiar.* The difference between a knowing and the known, the advent of this awareness is quite simply mind blowing. How can I look at my family and not see familiarity? When I look at faces of loved ones or the faces of strangers both faces appear strange in the way

that a waterfall is both stilled and dynamic in its continuously renewed and fresh form, as a clear rush of liquid being, as beginning with no end in itself. This is no small consideration to take up within what appears to be given up. This surprising state provokes a question: where do the old versions of my mother, my father, my sister, my brothers, and my niece go when these new versions appear? With no initial, conceptual explanation for this aspect of the deconditioning process, I am allowed to experience the extraordinary as strange in relation to the loss of the ordinary notion of familiarity. In trusting what is going on, I accept this strangeness as a loss of familiarity and a gain in wonder. In the loss, I know new concerns. In going back to Kelowna, I feel concerned I will not be able to keep up to them since I am emptied of that which makes life fast. I feel concerned about disappointing them when I cannot relate to them in ways I used to. I feel concerned that they will notice that they, as my family, are no longer familiar. I feel concerned that I will forget them—to lose them forever while they are alive—as I forget my previous self and life. And yet, I wonder. In seeing freedom in the soft folds of skin at the corners of their eyes, I wonder as I turn their attention away from the futility they project upon their world. In listening to the dreariness that weighs their words, I wonder as I speak so as to lift the learned loads of languishing life out of their hearts. In watching their gifts shimmer behind leaden distractions, I wonder as I alchemize their primordial pain so as to release the glorious gold within them. In visiting them back home, I wonder as I think about inviting them to know that I am homeless with complete feelings for home—a welcoming depth that deepens inside me—but without the words for home.



In a loss of self, a loss of personal will, I am no longer limited to tend the personal garden of self, I am free to walk without wearying into a limitless wilderness of wonder. In embodied surrender, I go into the empty room as a symbol for the self.

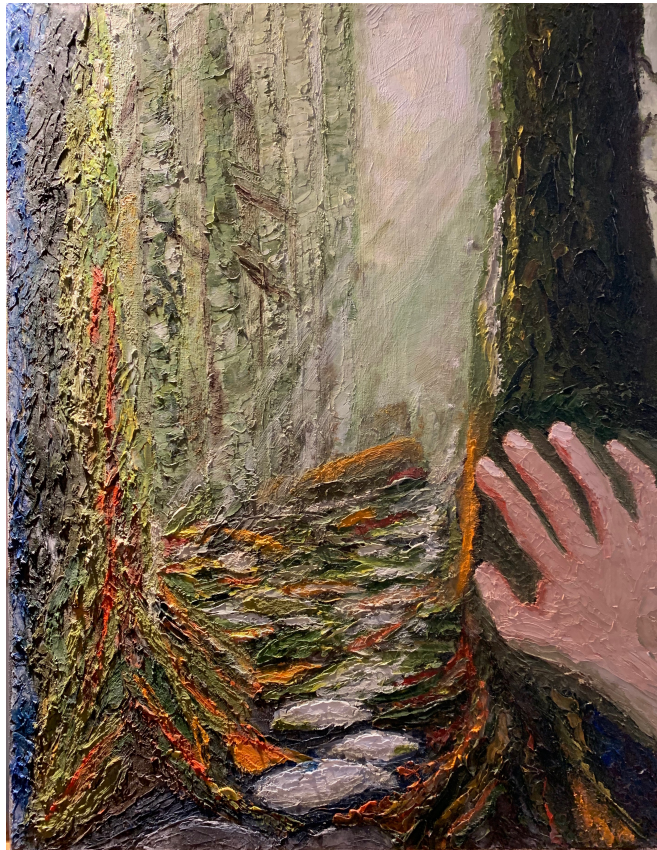


Fig. 3 Collins, Jody. *Wilderness of Wonder*. February 2018.

If you encounter your own empty promise, you must show courage. This experience is difficult. You will feel and be quite aware of how this inner, private, intimate experience possesses you. You will need to develop a companionship with it, as it is your spiritual truth. You will take care of it as you would a child. Somehow, you will know you are losing your self as this empty promise presents itself deep within you, but you trust the spirit of

all life enter you. You will hold this spirit within with a great sense of responsibility. You will need to silently attend to this inner, invisible, incomprehensible loss even as you participate in non-spiritual matters. This loss and emptying will work on you to prepare you for the absolute, immediate abundance of spiritual intimacy.

## Second Wall

Meanwhile, externally, when I meet and encounter new or old friends, I abide in wholehearted *delight*—as the euphoric illumination comes to me as the epiphany over and over again. While attending a grief group on campus, I tell the members of the group, I attend to my loss in finding an abundance of “delight” in the simplicity of being made simple in presence of others. It is the spirit of loss and delight that helps you to enjoy being simple. By this delight, I am assured that there is a purpose to the new depth of emptiness and grief within. This is what I want for you in loss. I want you to delight in the unstoppable, abundant presence of others. Trust it. I want you to trust this delight to help you to keep going even though you could easily be stopped by the more meaningless matters of grief and loss. Remember: the meaning of loss is love. Delight is an expression of love, and love is meaning in movement, so keep going.

Outwardly, I celebrate the epiphany *as* the embodiment of it. In relationship, in losing him, I *now* find Him everywhere, that “Him” is everyone. Within a wholehearted, commitment, I realize that “through losing him,” I “find” that I love *everyone* as though he, she or it is Caleb as “Him,” as *everyone* integrated into one pure and absolute spirit. With an open heart, in loss, I want you to find your loved one in everyone, in connection to the

oneness of everywhere. Again, with an invitation reverence and humility, you are welcome to understand “you” as God, spirit, if you prefer no name, my higher soul or self, and/or you, the reader. I will be a companion to you through the experience of loss, heart opening and spiritual development.

In the morning, when I climb out of bed, from my heart, I greet “Everyone.” When I pass someone on the sidewalk, with a numinous sense of joyous connection, I pass “Everyone.” In entering into a room, I am joining “Everyone” within the jubilation of spirit. In interconnected relationship to “Everyone,” as “Him,” here, is how I stay in relationship with Caleb—with Caleb’s spirit—now that he is gone. I want you to stay in relationship with your loved one in the sustained commitment of your heart made whole and open in loving everyone in oneness. With this sudden breakthrough, I transcend material loss through an immaterial integration of Caleb’s spirit with the spirit of everyone and everything, everywhere. This is what it is to realize an abundance of meaning in the meaningless absence of a loved one.

Before reading Polanyi, I only have an affective, intuitive understanding of the impact of symbols and metaphors on the self. This is an expression of the sensitivity of the soul prepared to go into uncertainty and meaninglessness in support of the empty promise to return to embodied meaning. In *Meaning*, he writes “the symbol becomes integrated but the self also becomes integrated as it is carried away by the symbol—or given to it,” which means, in going into the empty room, I, as a self, will be empty when *carried away* and *given* to the empty room (*Meaning* 75). The question is will “I” be a mere indication of emptiness or the embodiment of it? What is emptiness? And, what is it to embody the empty room?

Drawing on Polanyi's notion of an indication—as a hint—of a symbol as “self-centred” and the embodiment—as the manifestation—of a symbol as “self-giving,” the questions reflect the difference in the verifiable result of being self-centred or self-giving (*Meaning* 73-79). What, then, is self-centred? And, what is self-giving? By virtue of entering into the empty room, I enter into these questions. And so, in leaving the ordinary to go into the extraordinary, as a promise kept in the mystical reach through loss, I will reach the abyss. I will reach the gap. I will reach the void. And, in giving my self, I will reach you.

Mobilized by a full sense of joy, stilled by a soft attention on the empty room, I attend university classes and continue training as a restorative justice practitioner for a local organization called Restorative Justice Victoria. In 2013, Restorative Justice Victoria is a small but vibrant, volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization that provides a relationship-focused, alternative response to crime. This diversion program supports the responsible party's expression of accountability and offers opportunities to the affected party to voice the impacts or harms he or she experiences, as a result of the offender's actions, through restorative dialogues and meaningful outcomes that address the impacts and harms to the affected party, the community and society—in support of justice, restitution, and, at times, healing for all involved.

In general preparation for restorative justice meetings, with clear awareness I am entering into a new depth of inner experience, which I am told is a “psychic opening,” I attune with and attend to my need to be very organized on the case and client details. As this new state takes hold, in sitting with the clients, I experience profound immediacy, boundlessness and spirited, selfless connection with them, as I listen to and respond to

them. I call this boundless absorption “falling into” the object of my attention such that my own subjectivity completely disappears. Whether I am engaged in dialogue or sitting in silence, I “fall into” the object much like I “fall into” a shimmering, black crow, the green leaves of a tree that fret and tremble toward a supernatural, resting stillness, or a brass hinge touched by sunlight so as to liberate it from its base utility within an illuminating purpose to swing open the golden gate of the ecstatic heart. The object of my attention is enlivened as the abundance of beauty within direct experience and complete connection—free from the limiting, interfering or corrupt judgments of human nature. The careful preparation for cases grounds me within the groundlessness of an ultimate intimacy in emptiness: as an empty self. This is very difficult, I know. You will need to be sensitive. This is sensitive work. In turn, you will be sensitive in so far as how you relate to your self, others and your sacred work. The relationship with the divine, which, existing within the subtlest of realms, is best attended to and attuned with sensitively. You must be attentive. Simply put, by getting out of the way, the way of the lower self, that is, with an empty mind, as an absence of prescribed, limiting reason or meaning, I am held open by way of the heart and spirit so as to receive an unlimited abundance of true, real, good and beautiful meaning. Going beyond the intellect, I see with eyes claimed by a heart opened by spirit. These spiritual eyes are my instruments in the mystical reach through loss. In leaving the ordinary to go into the extraordinary, in accepting an empty promise as pure, perfect potential, in a commitment to keep going through a series of broken promises, in the mystical reach through loss, in realizing I can see in the dark, I claim the dark with sight given by the light of compassion.

In this way, situated upon a groundless ground, there is no “falling into” anyone or anything, as it is all flight in the direct experience and pure awareness of being there—right there, as pure being itself. In the same way, I do not “fall” in love with colleagues, clients, friends, crows, trees, or hinges. In pure being, I speak in tones of love as love it self. I listen with the ears of love as love it self. In the flight of fearless friendship, I will fly as love as love itself. Within every kind of weather, in the emptiness and uncertainty, I stand strong in love. Like a holy hinge with brass capacity, as a heart swung all the way open, through an entryway emptied of self, my spirit welcomes homeless hearts home.

It is spring of 2013. Now, I am aware of a profound change in sensory experience, as a refinement and renewed vitality and awareness of sight, hearing, touch, taste, which directly deepens and expands cognitive, emotional and spiritual experience. In being so very immersed in the space of here-and-now, I forget that I, myself, am there at all. I give myself to it all as the one vision, the one note, the one thought, the one feeling. I am told this is an experience of deep and vast *merging*. In recalling Huxley’s perennial wisdom that “knowledge is always a function of being”, with direct experience of spirit, as spirit itself, I know pure awareness of essence revealed as enlivened vibrancy and *clarity in colours, shapes, and textures* in objects, nature and people, as pure essence itself. Opened by spirit, possessed by heart, as reach itself, as a promise kept, my eyes, in turn, see the spirit and heart of life itself in all things. I perceive a new, once unknown, concealed tone of subtle sound that pierces crude sound so that all sound now comes toward my newly attuned ears in both vertical and horizontal waves that my empty ears engulf in service of the jubilant joining of the life that appears to be without me with the life that is within me.

The second wall symbolizes an account of the observable changes I experience within my nervous system, which must expand in capacity so as to be able to hold and support what the epiphany “and so, through losing him, I will now find him everywhere” declares in manifestation of the mystical reach. Simply put, if my mind, body and heart open in the promise made by a transformed personal will “through losing him,” my nervous system needs to also expand and transform in order to give me the inner strength to sustain “now,” as in all at once, with immediacy, by declaration of the divine will “to now find Him everywhere.”

What is it to find him everywhere? In losing him, Caleb, that is, in the mystical reach, the purpose is union with Him—the real, absolute, pure spirit and consciousness. The observance of reverence requires a nervous system that can sustain an all-encompassing awe of direct experience of and union with the divine. It is a process of cleansing a dirty cup so as to hold the purest water. It is a process of tuning the nerve strings of a harp in preparation for playing by the great holy hands of spirit. I go beyond my senses to meet God—and Caleb—everywhere, in all objects living and non-living. My attention is entirely claimed by spirit. This, of course, is a welcome projection of the spirit, which claims my very being. In coming to the second wall, I intuit it as the extremely important work of understanding and caring for “the instrument.” What is the instrument? In my understanding, it is the integration and attunement of the body, mind and heart in service of spiritual eyes. The second wall depicts a time and space of getting to know and support the changes to my nervous system. With support for and awareness of my nervous system, this established connection between body and mind generates a capacity to harmoniously hold the high voltage, direct experience of spirit.

### Third Wall

In the early summer of 2013, in approaching the third wall, with each small step, I am reformed by a most profound humility in what appears to be a total retreat from myself. Moving closer to this wall, toward complete inner stillness, I realize I am nothing but *a commitment* to this white, molten mystery that liquefies me only so that I may flow into it—and be given to it, as it already is. The moment I set my inner eyes upon it, my mind is bleached of any and all colour of consciousness. By negative refrain of thought, my mind is silent. There is no practice. There is only refrain. I am simply empty.

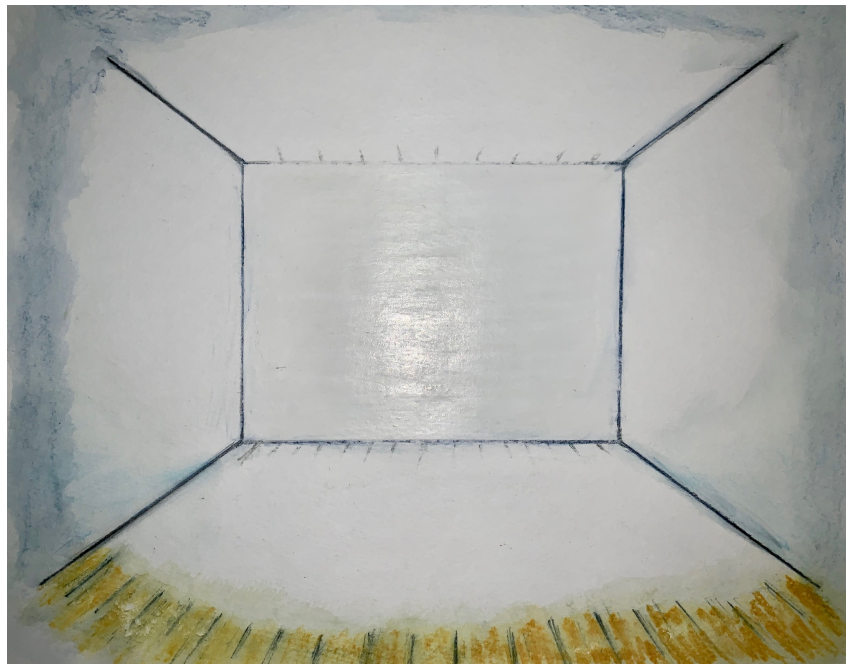


Fig. 4 Collins, Jody. *The Third Wall or the Abyss*. July 2013.

What is the abyss? The abyss is the surrender of the self to the supreme. I am at once an invisible and indivisible feature in oneness, itself. When I bring thoughts to my mind, I



think in terms of relationship. It is my heart that does the thinking now, and, now, in the surrender of self to the supreme, I am at a loss to claim to know much of anything. I only know a direct experience of intimacy. And yet, in reciting the epiphany, “And so through losing him, I will now find Him everywhere,” in saying Caleb’s name, I know the ineffable, nameless, spiritual nature of my soul. In general, with a loss of particularity, I am at a loss for words and details. This loss persists. And that gain in intimacy also persists. Intimacy is beyond language. Intimacy is also beyond desire since desire is the expression of awareness of what is already intimately present, as an abundance of meaning, and what is not intimately present, as an absence of meaning.

At the time the abyss comes to me, during the summer of 2014, sitting in a warm office with a psychologist, as tears tumble from my eyes into my empty hands, in a perfect paradox of what seems beyond possible, I declare, “I am everywhere and nowhere”. All at once, I am silenced as oblivion, itself. Then, in looking down at the emptiness of my hands, the thrust of tears, as existence, halt. I surrender to an unknowable emptiness. That is all. It is not the identification of emptiness. It is simply emptiness. At the time, I am empty in terms of what can be said. And so, without a second wasted on denial, I accept that in losing him, I will now find him everywhere *and* nowhere. *How on earth am I going to find him everywhere and nowhere?* In following him, in reaching, as reach itself, as a promise kept, in being the presence of the full room itself, I know that “everywhere” promises union and unity. What does “nowhere” promise? I don’t know. At the time of the declaration, I simply accept it, as it is.

Within the experience of “everywhere” in following the instructions of the epiphany, which directs that, “I will now find Him everywhere,” and without any immediate

instructions on what it means to be “nowhere,” I am in the dark about how to navigate “nowhere.” And yet, even though it is mildly distressing, I trust this addition of “nowhere” because it comes to me with unmediated, gnostic import. With an absence of direction or meaning, nowhere appears to offer an opportunity for trust or belief. Beyond belief, as an absence of meaning, I do not know what to make of nowhere. At first, since the direct experience of everywhere claims me, I simply abide in being everywhere and nowhere. If everywhere is a blissful expansion of love in the abiding experience of the extraordinary, Elysian field of oneness in the everyday, nowhere seems to be the simple, condensed experience of the ordinary into a comparative nothingness. I am nowhere. In looking in the mirror, I find I am not there. I am nowhere. I am no one. I am nothing. And, within the oneness, the interconnectedness, I am everywhere. I am everyone. At once, emptied of self, I find my spirit in all things. Intellectually, affirming a new appreciation for paradox with nowhere as an opposite of everywhere, I continue to trust the intuitive intelligibility of opposites, which I have begun to pursue in academic papers in expression of an expanded perspective.

If “everywhere”, within, “I will now find Him everywhere,” indicates a sudden surrender of my personal will to the divine will, then “nowhere,” which comes to me with tearful, gnostic import, as “I am everywhere and nowhere,” indicates a transformation in being and experience of reality from mundane or ordinary to supra mundane or extraordinary. In other words, in terms of being and reality, in the claim that “I am everywhere and nowhere,” the ordinary is now enlivened by the extraordinary where it can no longer be claimed to be separate. The transcendental experience of everywhere subsumes nowhere so as to integrate the experience of ordinary being and reality within

the extraordinary where it belongs to it. The ordinary rises to the extraordinary. Simply put, the ordinary, regarded as “nowhere,” is now extraordinary in being “everywhere”—where nowhere and everywhere are one extraordinary reality. And, in the declaration, “I am everywhere and nowhere,” at once emptied of self-centeredness, in the embodiment of emptiness, in the self-giving to it, I am inseparable from that reality so as to simply be it. In being nowhere but everywhere, as spirit, itself, I, personally, am nothing. I, personally, am nowhere.

Three years after I tearfully, declare, “I am everywhere and nowhere,” in reading, *The Experience of No-Self: A Contemplative Journey*, I find comfort and companionship in Bernadette Roberts’ own experience of everywhere and nowhere. She writes, the first contemplative movement is the transition from self to no-self. The second movement is the transition from no-self to nowhere—meaning nowhere in particular, yet everywhere in general (105).

This is the experience of the abyss: to realize my self to be nothing. At first glance, I am open to infinite love in being nothing. Going beyond morality, I am open to a conscience of connectedness. In gazing into the abyss, which, as with the epiphany, comes to me whole and perfect, I look into the slow reveal. The spiritual abyss or everywhere cannot be separated into particulars. It lacks particularity. The epiphany is an abundance of meaning, but the abyss goes beyond meaning. In gazing into the depths of emptiness, in the absence of self, the abyss is what remains as nothingness.

In perceiving that *I am everywhere and nowhere*, I surrender so as to be carried away by space, as space itself. I perceive the pure, perfect, preciousness that, as it rests

within, animates each and every person, animal, plant and object without thought or interference. In time, the list of perception expands to include new realms of complete companionship so as to be in total solemnity of spirit with solidarity of feeling and without solitary thought of taking what is given for granted. With time, space and awareness, at the grocery store a list of food items is absolutely necessary to assist in how, as I forget myself, I will remember the things I need to get amidst the completely compelling awareness of connectedness with and in all the animate and inanimate things in the store. What is the connection to the inanimate? The inanimate is animated within a hallowed, heart-based logic of vitality that shines a brimming brilliance back and forth between the object and myself. It is a glorious greeting. In the produce section, I am moved by movement itself so as to be liberated from mere mechanics to merge with the melodic nature of the mundane playing behind the more staccato structure and culture of the grocery store experience, as though attuned to the very purpose and expression of reality. I return to the store almost more often than required just so I can experience a glittering release of grace in each greeting, as the ultimate greeting itself. This store is my church.

In walking downtown for rest or for some purpose, I am aware of the subtle secrets set free from the faces of people who walk in a demonstration of distraction, as though this display of distraction is what conceals the secrets they unknowingly tell. This sidewalk is a space provided in place of pews for prayer and the pulse of psalms recited as impermanent footsteps cast upon concrete. This sidewalk is my majestic mountainside offering a most spectacular view in mundane proportions. In standing in a line-up in a coffee shop, I see matchless, reverent anticipation resting behind each and every preconditioned greeting or interaction.

In riding the bus, with a swipe of a card, I submit to be a perfect passenger in the heart of all that matters, which is nothing more than what is here, now. With unalloyed awareness of time and space, in being time and space itself, there is nothing more than riding this bus. When there is no rush, within time, toward some space, the space is time itself. Whether the bus is full or not, without any want for more emptied from me, I am myself an entirely, emptied agenda. I board a seemingly mechanical surrender whereby the destination is instantaneous as here-and-now, as the uninterrupted awareness of no time all the time in time, as the inclusive nature of the instant. In perfected paradox, others around me react to time by keeping time so as to by some necessity exclude themselves from its nearly nebulous nature. In my heart, as I look into their eyes, I hold their immanent emancipation from the everyday so as to join me in the awareness, space and time as all-in-one day. In sitting at a bar, in looking around at all the various arrangements of relationship, I am aware of the pure, subtle essence of a person that rests in real relationship behind what is poorly approximated in words, expressions, gestures, and silences.

In sitting in a crowded room, in being everywhere and nowhere in particular, as everywhere and nowhere myself, I am complete as space itself. In conversation, I am astonished by the expansion of an unmitigated memory that, at times, takes in so much that the psyche is given to new limits so as to hold the generosity of spirit that comes to me freely and without any sense of exchange. In sitting alone in my reading chair, as I recall all that I see with eyes open to the ease of essence, *I am alone but I am not lonely*. I am complete. Beyond what is offered by the five senses, I am aware that I thrive within a living language of relationship. This is a basic account of what I, as everywhere and nowhere,

know as walking spirituality. This is what finding him/Him nowhere promises. I find him in the everyday. I find him/Him as the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Religious studies scholar and physicist, Ravi Ravindra acknowledges the eternal or the infinite as a “timeless quality of being” (“Self Awareness and Self Transformation”, Lecture 2019). This quality of being cannot be achieved in commitment to life, as I know it. No. In leaving life, as I know it, as the ordinary, to go through the door of the first wall, by natural progression, I am what it is to keep going. And so, with full commitment, in leaving the ordinary, I go into the extraordinary—into the empty room—as a promise kept in order to reach, as reach itself, *a new quality of being*. It is the second wall that marks this possibility. And yet, without knowing, being is incomplete, which is to say, I still have so very much to know about this experience of being everywhere, as extraordinary union, and nowhere, as emptiness and the ordinary. This need to know within the unknowable brings me to the third wall.

Standing back from the psychic abyss, the experience of being everywhere and nowhere, in the process of realizing what it is to be emptied of self and filled with spirit, I attempt practical application of new wisdom that comes to me as the epiphany. One afternoon during a restorative justice dialogue with a client who recently experienced the loss of her father, which appears to have informed her act of crime, I share the secret wisdom of loss that comes to me over and over again with renewed revelation. In holding a still presence with inner silence, in sharing the loss of Caleb with her, in saying the epiphany aloud, “and so, in losing him, I will now find Him everywhere,” I tell her that she is “Him.” I tell her that

my colleague is "Him." I tell her that the beautiful, wild flowers in the centre of the table are each and all "Him." Who is he? He is Caleb's spirit. He is the divine. He is one in all things, living and non-living. In knowing the loss and absence of a loved one in earthy relationship, we can also know a heavenly abundance in finding this loved one within *a ritual of reverence* in spiritual relationship to anyone and everyone. The wisdom is not intended to displace her grief. We agree on this. And this wisdom may help her in staying routinely connected to her love for her father, as the meaning of loss, in knowing this love is increased in the love for others. It is all one love, which no amount of loss can take, especially in the giving of it. In the embodiment of the epiphany in complete, committed service to it, I know *the consequences* of the mystical reach through loss. As a promise kept, by spiritual illumination, in being emptied of myself, I am filled with Caleb, as wholeheartedness and faith, as the pure, permanent, spiritual connection and reverential service to all life *as spirit* itself.

Over the next few years, in this emptiness, in being claimed by intense intimacy and immediacy, I know a loss of language, details and texture when my sensory experience is completely claimed by attention to the relational, which reforms both my experience of the world, the inner and outer, and my communication about it. I no longer think in terms of the five senses. There are no particulars. I am emptied of details. What remains? I remain sudden. The third wall, then, embodies an entrance into the new state of remaining sudden. What is this state? It is a numinous state of open humility and continuous renewals of astonishment. In encountering the abyss, I immediately embody a thoughtless discipline of

not-knowing, which I begin to explore in writing a paper titled, “The Meaning of Not-Knowing.” The abyss is an immersion with immutable wonder. Within a collapse of time, as “now,” and space, as “everywhere” all the time, as in no time, this permanent state of here and now is what I come to know as *remaining sudden*. In this sense, “sudden” means immediate, proximate, close, and absolutely intimate. In suddenness, where interior and exterior reality are one, the experience of time is open and boundless. Losing its texture of finitude, time remains or endures in a space of boundless intimacy. What do I mean by intimacy? It is a given, immediate, direct closeness and strange familiarity with everything and everyone, everywhere. I realize that I now perceive spirit, directly. In these early days in the empty room, I do not capture this super sensibility in words. In a few years, much like this permanent strangeness possesses me, a phrase comes to possess me as what can be said about this strange state whereby “I remain sudden”. It is a living and lived paradox.

Remaining sudden is an enduring, uninterrupted state of continuous renewals of astonishment. It is a state of absolute freedom from forensic fallacy. It is as simple as it is complex. Simply put, I do not take anyone or anything for granted simply because it is all new—with sparkingly astonishing renewal—and this seems to absorb any and all notions of the aspect of familiarity that provokes the unconscious or conscious response of taking someone or something for granted. In simple terms, I do not experience any sense of “Oh, you again”, which appears to be an acceptance of the biological imperative that has one identify all that is familiar as something to be overlooked, as something that is not newly helpful or newly dangerous. It is a state of absolute abandonment without anxiety. It is a freedom from futility without the need to forge for provision in perception with only the five senses. It is a fellowship of immediate friendship as a given that supersedes taking



anything or anyone for granted. This is a relationship to the spirit in all as one. Still, in order to fully realize the simplicity, as simplicity itself, I must attend—by way of experience—to the complexity naturally located within what it is to remain sudden. What is this complexity? It is loss. I realize that I am alone in this perception of remaining sudden.

In support of this integrated commitment between union and purpose, recalling Polanyi's chiasmus, "we do not surrender to a symbol unless we are carried away by it, and if we are not carried away by it, we do not surrender," I immerse myself in the "rapture in a metaphor" that arises when we involve the self (*Meaning* 75-79). In immersing my self in the full structure of the empty room, I will reach, reveal and embody the true nature of emptiness through the abyss. And, as a promise kept in the mystical reach through loss, in entering into an empty promise of pure, perfect potential, I invite you into the emptiness—to dwell in the empty promise within you. In revisiting Figure 3, a depiction of the third wall and the abyss, what is the floor or the ground in the empty room? What might it symbolize? In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger refers to being as a ground without a ground—an abyss—that is only accessible as meaning in the abyss of meaninglessness (194).

In encountering the abyss, with my inner eyes, I look into the slow reveal. And how am I as a self integrated with it? Following through with Polanyi's connection between the symbol and the self, am I the embodiment of the abyss? Or am I an indication of it? I am an embodiment of the abyss, as pure consciousness, when I surrender "the diffuse memories and experiences of the self" *into* the abyss. In other words, in a joyous loss of self, as soon as I am given to it, I give my self, my memories and experiences to the abyss. I am nothing. In this loss of self, I am nowhere to be found. In this embodied embrace, I am privacy, itself.

Standing before this “abyss of wisdom”, as named by John of the Cross, that raises up and exalts my soul, all at once, I learn “how base and defective” are my ordinary faculties in trying “to reach it, still less explain this secret” (*Dark Night of the Soul* 89). Still, from the centre of my soul, as spirit itself, with absolute trust, I reach into the abyss without really knowing what will come to me or what will become of me. Grasping nothing of it within my intellect, I reach for reason and find none, but in pulling my hands out of the abyss, I see now the empty palms of my hands are forever reformed as a reflection of my untouched, innermost heart.



Fig. 5 Collins, Jody. *Embracing Emptiness*. October 2017.

### Dark Corner of Denial

With a newly established abundance of everywhere, I reach nowhere. I reach the dark corner of denial. What is this dark recess? In the absence of meaning, in a loss of love, I

suffer in the perceived meaninglessness of nowhere. After an earth-shattering epiphany, with an abundance of spirit, as a promise kept, in the immediate, intimacy so as to “find Him everywhere,” I suddenly suffer the ordinary reality that I will find Him “nowhere.” I am reminded of searing separation and an absence of spirit in my relationships and social reality. With newly established knowledge of and being in a transcendent “everywhere,” in following my spiritual instructions, I attempt to land the extraordinary, otherworldly flight of the epiphany in the ordinary world. It seems to land nowhere at all. Instead, without yet expanding into the infinite knowledge and being of everywhere, in resisting the nature of the ordinary, I suffer in the reality that “I will now find Him” nowhere.

Meanwhile, during the summer of 2014, I begin to intuit my support relationship is concealing a dark agenda, an agenda that I ask about, but am not told about, and an agenda that denies the trust, safety and silence I asked for and needed in support of my loss and mystical awakening. This agenda is born stillborn in that it comes to the world through carelessness to serve the spiritual life of a community in a dark irony. What is the dark irony? The agenda conceals its true conception: a careless, avoidable harming of one to help the many within an exclusionary, limited purview of care. Ironically, I inspired the agenda that exploited me. I inspired the agenda that complicated my own spiritual development. With entitlement, if you attend to what you are allowed to do, rather than how you can be in relationship, you project a sharp shadow of hypocritical harm that pierces the hearts of one another and the community. Offering only a general description, I realize the particulars of this betrayal will give no meaning to this dark denial.

I see, now.

I am blinded

by what I overlooked.

What do I overlook? I overlook the dark. I overlook ignorance. This is a metaphor for betrayal. In the breaking of a promise, in the breaking of trust, there is a breach in relationships—social and professional. A gap opens up. I experience this gap as searing separation. Rather than stay on one side or be split by the breach, I stand in the gap. Standing in the gap, I shout into the dark corner of denial. In turning from the dark corner, toward breaking the fourth wall, instead of breaking through, I stand in front of a stonewall, which is intended to separate and silence. In this searing separation, I scream about integrity. Standing in the gap, acting out of anger, I betray my soul. How so? I want to be silent. I want to be empty of particulars. I want to be in solitude. I want to reach through ignorance for spirit. In this betrayal, by perfect paradox, I reach ignorance. In standing in the gap, as a promise kept in the mystical reach through loss, in speaking-truth-to-power, I am a go-between for the people and spirit. Still, in standing in the gap, with contemplative prayer for those who harmed me, I want to silently pray for them, as the Bible instructs.

Stepping back to safety of the dark corner of denial, in standing in the gap between the abyss of wisdom and the breakthrough to absolute ignorance so as to reach you, in screeching about fairness, accountability, and transparency, I decide to be silent like the stonewall before me. Now blocked in by the stonewall, I know my words only echo within the empty room. I go more deeply into the emptiness and the silence. I am really nowhere now.

In *Dark Night of the Soul*, John of the Cross, writes the more a soul is raised up, the more deeply does it find itself hidden (89). This “finding itself hidden” is the realm of nowhere. While in the dark corner of denial, as the spiritual everywhere works upon me, in finding Him and my self nowhere, with intention, I hide my soul in the armpit of God (Fig. 6). In reality, through the searing separation of worldly troubles, in commitment to the integrity of my soul and union with the divine, with a devotional quality of being on earth as it is in heaven, I hide my soul in the armpit of my psychotherapist. In the dark, I hide my soul in the armpit of Dawn.

This is metaphor for betrayal. What did I overlook? In the mystical reach, I overlooked ignorance. I overlooked limitations. In acts of self-preservation, in gazing at my own humanity, I confess: I overlooked the humanity of others. The dark corner of denial is nothing more than a distraction whereby I shifted my attention from reaching to ignorance, which is the opposite of reach as the mystical capacity. In this time, in accepting my own ignorance, I accept ignorance of God. The reach and the ignorance are sacred. In *The Dark Night of the Soul*, John of the Cross writes of the benefits the dark causes in the soul with “the knowledge of oneself and of one’s misery” and the aridity and “emptiness of the faculties” to make it recognize its own “lowliness and misery” that, in times of prosperity, it is unable to see. (30). I overlook my own ignorance. I am a fool. The world is filled with betrayals. In going into the empty promise, as a promise kept, I accepted to be empty of expectations. If I expect anything from the world, I become a broken promise, myself. In standing in the gap, if I make demands, I stand to betray and deny my spirit the opportunity to progress—to break through to reach you.



Fig. 6 Collins, Jody. *The Armpit of God*. July 2018

It is the dark that teaches us discernment. You must gaze into the dark corner and are blinded by absolute ignorance. In your own mystical reach, in the commitment to keep going through loss in service of love, you might be called to stop and stand in the gap. You might be called to speak to the denial of the importance of spirit. You might be called to stand in the gap created by a breach of trust where, on one side, you see what is as dishonesty, manipulation, exclusion and entitlements in the denial of the opposites, and, on one side, you see a what ought to be, as an abiding desire for an acceptance affirmed as humanity, reverence, truth, goodness and beauty.

In the dark, in the emptiness, I find an absence of meaning. If the meaning of loss is love, the dark is an opportunity to love what cannot be comprehended or what goes beyond meaning. The dark is also an accepted denial of the world through loss. With loss, through denial, in ignorance, we find God.

I see, now. God gave me eyes to see.

Just then, the world said, “Don’t look at me. I don’t look at myself.”

The dark is what is incomprehensible: infinite, absolute spirit. The dark is unreachable meaning. In the mystical reach through loss, as a promise kept, in entering into an empty promise, in the commitment to keep going through a series of dark, broken promises, I reach this wisdom. The negative is sacred. The dark is sacred too. Standing in the gap, in the loss of self, I stop to dwell in the dark corner of denial in order to find a home—to be at home in the dark. What is the meaning of a dark corner of denial as home? In *Meaning*, in his study of Christian mysticism, Polanyi explains that through a series of detachments—or losses—we reach for absolute ignorance of particulars, as emptiness, through *via negativa*, as with being everywhere and nowhere, in order to enter into union with him who is beyond all being and knowledge (128). In the commitment to keep going, I look up *via negativa*, which lead me to “the apophatic way,” as a negation of mental ideas within the conceptual mind (Pickering 145). This is the negative way. This is the way of the dark denial. This is the way of emptiness. Coming to me from beyond the intellect, the dark corner of denial is clearly a gift of gnosis, which takes me a long time to open and



appreciate because I stand in the dark gap—under the dark influence of absolute ignorance.



Fig. 7 Collins, Jody. *The Breakthrough*. May 2018.

### Breaking the Fourth Wall

In breaking the fourth wall, in embodiment rather than mere indication, as a promise kept in the mystical reach through loss, I desire to reach you. And, who are you again? You are spirit. You are my higher soul or self. You are the reader, my dear friend. You and I are one. What is this term: “breaking the fourth wall?” It is a literary device whereby the writer or speaker speaks directly to the reader or listener in a shift of point of view, which closes the distance between the reader and the more distant, intermediary narrator involved with the



first or third person point of view, as “I” and “we.” This direct speech to “you” evokes a quality of intimacy, honesty and trust, I hope. The direct speech is urgently instructive or warmly invitational which, I believe, contends with or balances the first or third point of view as somewhat self-congratulatory or presumptive to agreement.

And so, in looking deeply into my own soul, in entering into an empty promise of pure, perfect potential, in my commitment to reach you, what does inviting you to spirit promise? I don’t know. If, in the flight of spirit, the promise lands with you, am I promising you the Promised Land? I am not. I am simply a promise kept. How you will care for the promise kept between spirit and yourself? Will you listen to the inner voice of your soul? Will you look at yourself within a world that doesn’t look at itself? Will you keep going when you are stopped by loss and dark denials? Will you enter into an empty promise to receive spirit without any promise of return?

An empty promise is just that: empty. In this commitment to spiritual development, character growth, and liberation through self-loss, what will you do if you lose your social and professional life? What will you do if you lose the opportunities you worked so hard to achieve? In standing in the gap, in the commitment to keep going, you will move on. You will make a home in the dark corner of denial. The shadow of shame projected upon you will also move on. In a return to your centre, you will reach the light again. And in breaking the fourth wall, you will reach clarity of sight and voice again. In breaking the fourth wall, you will move through the stonewall that separates you from spirit. In breaking the fourth wall, you will cross the rubble of irreverence. You will not be defined by the brokenness of others. In forgetting the reminders of separation, you look to loss as an opportunity to

reach the pure, perfect potential of the empty promise. When given flight by my spirit, the promise only lands in relationship to you.

And so, I say to you, “Thank you for the reminder of separation. Now, I will forget it.” I invite you to forget it too. The wisdom, of course, is to not let the reminder take you away from what you forget: extraordinary, reverential, oneness within the ordinary. In knowing and being everywhere, you forget any and all reminders of separation. In the return to your centre, when given the chance, you will not let anyone down. How can I know this as truth? Your way is up—always, up. In the triumph of spirit, you rise to the challenge through loss. You don’t resign to being stopped by loss when it’s meaning is love, which is a movement of meaning. You keep going.

### Return to The Centre

In going through the full structure of the empty room, in the return to centre, so as to embody emptiness itself, what am I left with? A void. I am left with a still, silent mind. I am empty. In the void, which cannot be divided, you and I have full comprehension as an indivisible one in an incomprehensible oneness. In the return to centre, the void gives way to the divine centre. At the centre, I experience a shift in attention from ignorance to reach with the acceptance of ignorance of the incomprehensible dark corner of denial and the divine.

In this shift, with a shift from textural, sensory-based concerns, as the embodiment of emptiness, I am aware of an entirely relational experience and language use with more

attention on prepositions as the words that describe relationship in a sentence with a modifying role that situates the noun or pronoun in space and time. Analogically, in the gestured life, as a life of ineffability in the embodied awareness of union *with spirit in all as* one spirit, attention is not critical in character by description, but situated in quality and character by relationship. Reflecting ineffable relationship, as with the oil painting figured, prepositions cannot easily be defined without the use of our hands to show how something is situated in relationship to something else (Fig. 3, 5, 6, 7, 9).

Recalling Polanyi's artful logic, "the symbol becomes integrated but the self also becomes integrated as it is carried away by the symbol—or given to it," in a surrender to the abyss, I, as a self, am carried away by it so as to be integrated with it as emptiness itself (Meaning 75). Somehow pardoned of personality, I, personally, seem to vanish into universality.

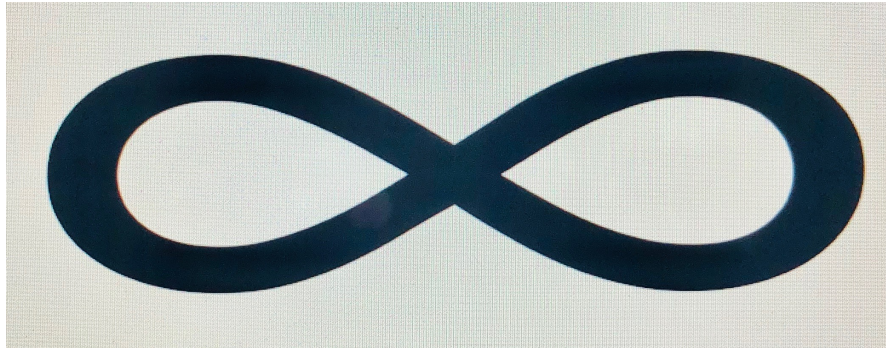
What remains? Emptied of myself, I remain sudden. In the Experience of No-Self..., Roberts beheld not one, but two voids. Not only was the self gone, but suddenly God was gone as well—the two, after all, had been one single center" (167). In the advent of the awareness of remaining sudden, a paradoxical state for resting within the activity, as the immanent immediacy, I am nothing. A neutral presence, I, my self, float in observing all that is, as it is, already.

It is the infinite dynamism between "what is" and "what ought to be" that brings heaven to earth by drawing together "what will be" and "what can be" so as to realize a centre point of "what must be" love. In recalling Krishnamurti's claim about truth, which cannot be brought down, we must make an effort to ascend to it (2). We can see that beholding love—*as the spiritual centre within* our centre—is what draws heaven and earth together.

Fig. 8 *Infinite Dynamism*

What can be in Heaven?

What is  
nowhere?



What ought  
to be  
everywhere?

What will be on Earth?

At this centre of the soul, in the intersection between “what will be” and “what can be” heaven and earth are “what must be” love as all-one. From the centre of the tension, I desire emptiness. I desire love. I desire God. And so, for me, as a promise kept, “what is” is meaningless without “what ought to be”, and, yet, in the ontological work of love—as both acceptance and denial—in the dynamic movement of a soul, as it is transformed by spirit to realize reverence for all souls “what will be” on earth, as it *is, ought to be* and “what can be,” as grace or infinite possibility, in heaven according to the essential or divine instructions of “what must be”. In other words, “what is” on the earth, as the ordinary, as nowhere, is simply an empty promise without “what ought to be,” as longing, in so far as this relates to our higher, spiritual nature. This dynamic, reverential force is the work of spirit resting, then, now and always, within the centre of being.

Recalling the question, in relation to the question of how to be here, how am I going to find him everywhere and nowhere? With the space, time and awareness of relationship, as the positive expression, I find him in the abyss, the void and the gap, as the negative

expression. And so, in losing him/Him, I really do find him/Him everywhere. Recalling the declaration, “I am everywhere and nowhere,” I find love and peace in the revelation of what it is to be “nowhere.” In the quality of being everywhere, as the permanent state of remaining sudden, as an enduring state of numinous, unified, astonishment, while being “nowhere”, as the realm of the ordinary, the boring, the banal, the tedious, the uninspiring, the arid, and the detached, I realize that I am in an extraordinary state within the experience of the ordinary. The ordinary is made to be extraordinary. In everyday appreciation, this is walking spirituality. In the reconciliation of the light, fully realized in the illuminating epiphany, and the dark, emptied of all but pure, perfect potential, at the intersection of space, time and awareness, I am realized as ecstatic emptiness. Recalling, how I allow to one thing to be mysterious is the empty room, I go into the mystery of the empty room, a numinous nothingness, an empty promise of pure, perfect potential in order to reveal the hidden lucidity in a return to the centre of everything else. Emptiness is the hidden lucidity at the centre of everything else. In finding Him everywhere, I find myself nowhere: in an ordinary, everyday heaven. This is what it is to be on earth as it is in heaven. When we *deny* “what is” or “what ought to be”, we immediately deny and prevent “what can be” in the way of higher truths in service of love and possibilities. We stop at “what will be.” We look no further—to accept *what is* as *what will remain to be concealed*—unless we keep going whereby we keep looking into the slow reveal and listening for the deeper tones so as to locate what can be within the commitment to what will be. And so, what will be?

What I know in going into the empty room is communion with spirit, as union, with the suddenness of an extraordinary everywhere, as unity, in an ordinary nowhere.



Figure 9. Collins, Jody. *The Mystical Reach (Unfinished)*. August 2019 – present.

What I trust I will come to know within the emptiness, as the opposite of and compliment to communion, is autonomy. It is emptiness that offers divine intimacy *with* spirit and sacred sovereignty *as* spirit. This is the embodiment of emptiness. This is absolute lucidity. Without encountering each wall and aspect of self-emptying and without a return to the centre of the empty room, the full meaning of emptiness would be hidden from me. In order to live in the meanings, I am able to discern, in going into emptiness, I must embody emptiness so as to understand it (Meaning 75). In so far as how it serves my

understanding, in commitment to keep going through the emptying experience, this is the gift of loss. In the mystical reach through loss, I reach love *as* emptiness.

## Chapter Six: The Meaning of Loss

It's mid-December 2015. I am home for Christmas. And, now, after my last visit home to see family where I explored the experience of the familiar being strange in that I recognized my family members but they no longer appeared familiar since all familiarity is absorbed by a continuously, redeeming freshness and perpetual present, I am quietly open to see what comes to me over this visit.

In the kitchen, I sit next to Avery, who is eleven years old. We watch Shelley cross the kitchen to approach Calvin, who stands at the counter. She wraps her arms around his waist, lays her head on his back and whispers, "I love you" into his spine. While her parents embrace, Avery smiles at them even though loss is everywhere in their family life. And yet, when the three of them are together, Caleb is everywhere, in their home, in their embrace, and in their hearts. For Shelley and Calvin, this truth is a backbone they share to hold each other up when one or the other of them cannot walk through, stand in or kneel before their loss. Even in times of curling up and turning away from the world, with love as their strength, they never turn their backs on each other or the loss of their son. Meeting in high school, Shelley and Calvin know every, common innocence and every, extraordinary experience two people can face together. Pulling at his t-shirt playfully, Shelley exposes the top of Calvin's chest and tattoo: the portraiture of their two-year old son. Next to the portrait, the words, "In loving memory of Caleb David Blair Lantz" are written. Underneath, there are two momentous dates separated and joined by an insistent hyphen.





Figure 10. *Avery Lanz (15 years old). Summer 2019.*

## **In Conclusion: A Promise Kept to You**

In a promise kept to you, in going from the first wall to the third wall, as soon as breaking the fourth wall emerges, the purpose of entering the empty room becomes clear: to embody emptiness in the loss of my self within a great invitation to unite with pure spirit. And, in proceeding through the empty room, in the return to centre, in breaking the fourth wall, the purpose to unite with the divine, of course, includes uniting with “you.” And who are you? The answer is denied a name. And yet, you are spirit. You are Caleb. You are my higher soul and self. You remain sudden in the loss of self. You are the reader. You are my dear companion in silence. In the mystical reach through loss, this is the breakthrough—to you. And although this is an extraordinarily, intimate union, the union is given purpose in the giving of self—my self, my soul and my spirit. In the mystical reach, in emptiness, *I give my soul to you*. This promise involves you, my friend, in so far as what it means to keep going in my commitment to bring heaven to earth.

And so, why should we go ahead and resign to loss when its meaning is love? Is this acceptable? I don’t think so. We must keep going. If the meaning of loss is love, what is the meaninglessness of loss? It is separation. What does this mean for you? You can be aware of the reminders of separation. When you stand in the gap between the abyss and the breakthrough, you will forget these insistent reminders. How so? We are love. It is true. I get you. In giving up my self, I get you. Who are you? You are spirit. That’s it. That’s all. And, now, here, in going into the full structure of the empty room, in embodied emptiness, in a commitment to keep going, as a promise kept in the mystical reach through loss, with all

the love that comes to me in loss, in finding you, I return to you—*as* you.

In the flight of spirit, the promise lands with you. And so, recalling the night Caleb passed, in following him, as a promise kept—not made—in reaching as reach itself, as an empty promise of pure, perfect potential, in a commitment to keep going through a series of broken promises, in a return to the spiritual, inner centre of emptiness, in a voluntary surrender devoid of reason, I reach the Promised Land.

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