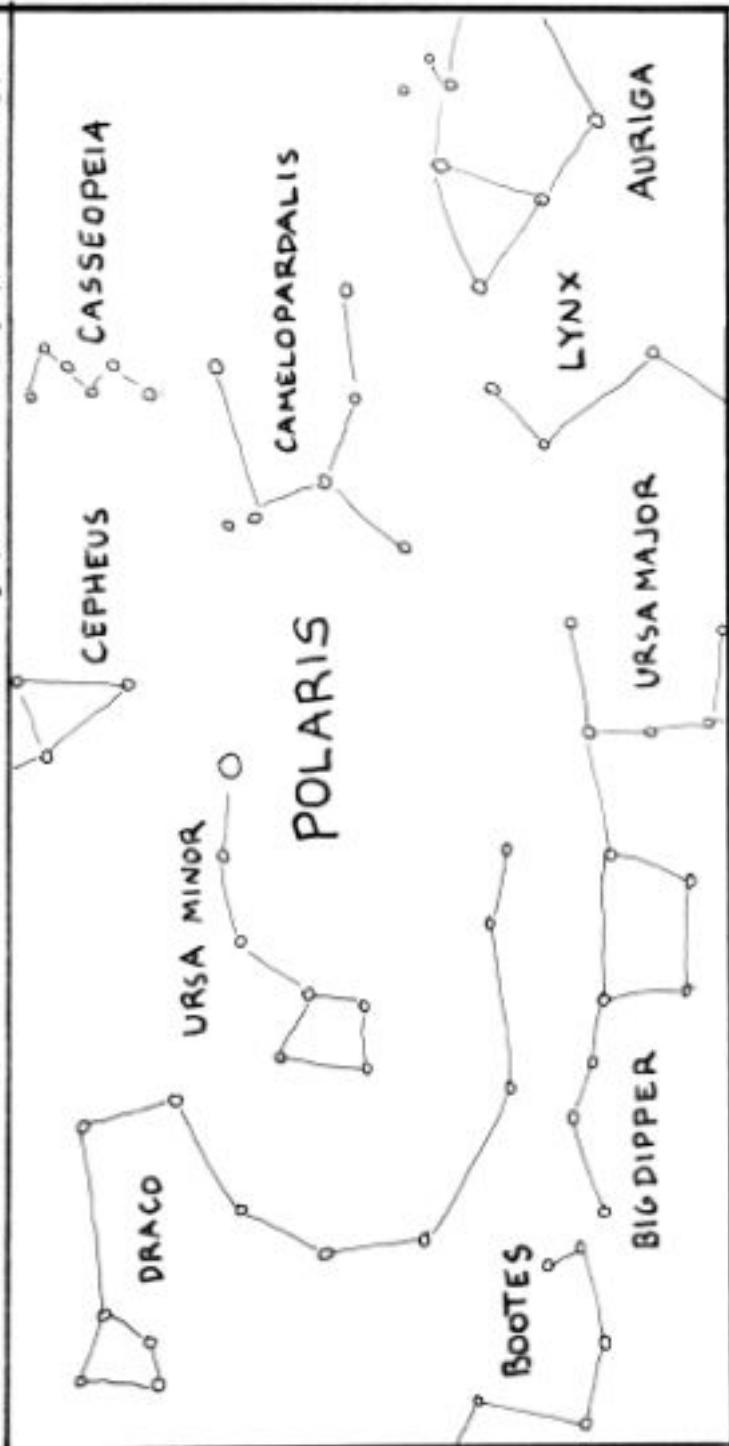


POLARIS WORDS: ART

BY
MEL DEE

WHEN I WAS A TINY LAD I WOULD LIE IN BED AND LOOK OUT THE SKYLIGHT AT NIGHT. I NOTICED ONE STAR ALWAYS STAYED IN THE SAME PLACE. LATER I LEARNED IT WAS THE NORTH STAR, POLARIS. ALL THE OTHER STARS MOVED AROUND IT AND I THOUGHT IT WAS THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE. LATER I LEARNED THAT WAS ONLY TRUE IN THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE OF EARTH. I LEARNED THAT REALLY NOTHING EVER STAYS THE WAY IT SEEMS.



THE DAY MY MOM DIED I KNEW THINGS WERE GOING TO CHANGE, BUT DIDN'T KNOW WHEN. SHE WAS UPRIGHT IN HER CHAIR, EYES OPEN AND FIXED ON THE TV. IT WAS LIKE NOTHING WAS DIFFERENT, ONLY SHE WAS GONE.



I WALKED ACROSS THE FIELDS TO ANNIE'S TRAILER THINKING ON WHAT I'D SAY TO HER. IT WAS ONLY WHEN I TOLD HER "MOM'S DEAD" DID THE TEARS COME OUT.



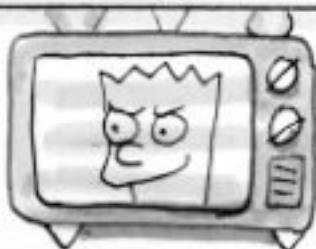
I WAS LAID UP FOR DAYS AFTER THAT. IT WAS NOT IN MY HABIT TO CRY. MY CONDITION MADE IT PAINFUL.



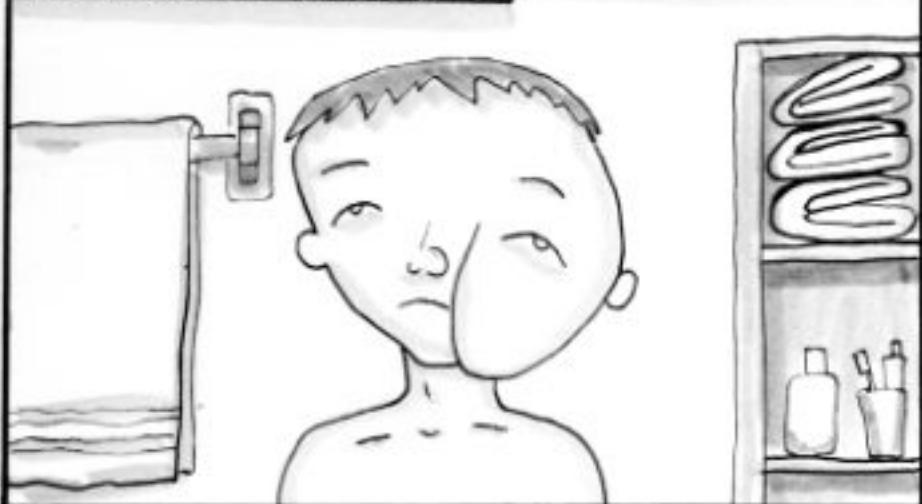
RIGHT. MY CONDITION. THE REASON MOM'S PASSING MEANT MY WORLD COULD MOVE. THEY KNEW AS SOON AS I EMERGED I'D NEVER HAVE A "NORMAL LIFE". THEY SAID MY FACE WOULD GROW UNTIL THE PRESSURE IN MY BRAIN KILLED ME UNLESS THEY PERFORMED REGULAR SURGERIES FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE. THEY SAID I MIGHT HAVE IMPAIRED COGNITIVE SKILLS. THEY OFFERED A LARGE DOSE OF MORPHINE TO PUT ME TO SLEEP. MY MOM TOOK ME HOME AND THAT'S WHERE I'VE BEEN EVER SINCE.



THE WORLD. I WASN'T IGNORANT TO ITS WAYS. I HAD TV, I HAD ANNIE, OUR FRIEND FROM ACROSS THE FIELD, AND FARMER JIM, WHO PLOWED THE DRIVE, DELIVERED CORDWOOD, AND WHOSE WIFE SENT ALONG THE OCCASIONAL CASSAROLE OR KNIT ITEM TO KEEP ME WARM OVER THE BITING WINTERS.



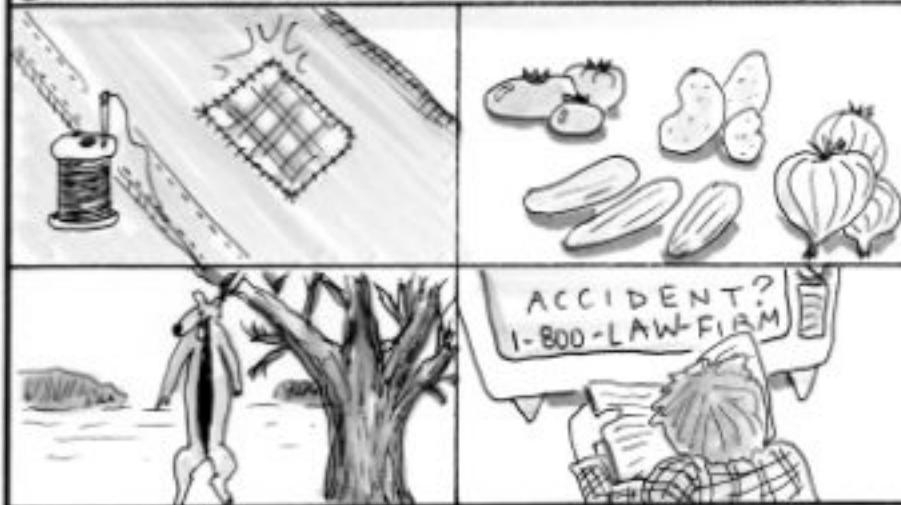
FROM WHAT I GLEANED FROM ALL THIS, THE WORLD WAS A MEAN PLACE THAT WOULD NOT SPARE ME ANY CRUELTY. ONLY IT LOOKED UPON MY FACE IT MIGHT EVEN TRY TO ENCOACH. THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, THE ELEPHANT MAN, MASK, I HAD SEEN THEM AND ONCE I GOT OVER WISHING THINGS WERE DIFFERENT, I ACCEPTED WHAT THEY WERE.



MOM AND I LIVED ON HER PARENTS' FARM, MY GRANDPARENTS BOTH DIED THERE, OMA IN HER SLEEP, OPA IN THE DRIVE SHOVELLING OUT HIS TRUCK. MY FATHER LEFT WHEN I WAS BORN AND AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED HE NEVER EXISTED AT ALL SINCE I DIDN'T REMEMBER HIM.



MOM, ANNIE, AND JIM TAUGHT ME ALL I NEEDED TO KNOW TO LIVE MY SIMPLE LIFE: HOW TO COOK, SPLIT WOOD, MEND CLOTHES, AND TEND THE SIZEABLE GARDEN WE HAD EACH SPRING. ANNIE TAUGHT ME TO FISH, DRESS OUT A DEER, TAN A HIDE. WHAT SPARE TIME I HAD I SPENT READING WITH THE TV ON. IT HELPED WITH THE LONELINESS AFTER MOM PASSED.



WHEN MOM DIED, ANNIE NOTIFIED THE AUTHORITIES. A LAWYER CAME AND EXPLAINED THERE WAS A TRUST SET UP FOR ME, TO HANDLE THE PROPERTY TAXES, BILLS, EXPENSES, OF WHICH THERE WERE FEW. MOM - AND FATHER - HAD PLANNED FOR THIS INEVITABILITY. I GUESS THEY THOUGHT IT THE LEAST THEY COULD DO, HAVING CHOSEN TO EXILE ME BEFORE THE WORLD COULD.



SUDDENLY, WHEN I WAS 23 YEARS OLD, 5 YEARS AFTER MOM PASSED, THE MONEY STOPPED COMING.



BREAKING GROUND FOR THE GARDEN THAT YEAR WAS TOUGH. IT WAS TOUGH TO GET STARTED ON ANYTHING. A STEELY COLD DREAD LOOMED BEHIND EVERYTHING...



AT NIGHT I DREAMT I WAS IN TOWN AND I STUCK OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB. EVERYONE WAS STARING AND THERE WAS NOWHERE TO HIDE.



AGAIN, I TURNED TO ANNIE.

ANNIE...

I HAVE
TO GO TO
TOWN

OH?

REMEMBER THE TRUST FUND?
THE BILLS WEREN'T PAID
LAST MONTH. I HAVE TO
FIND OUT WHY.

I CAN TAKE
YOU FREDERICK.
ARE YOU OKAY
WITH IT?



NO, NOT REALLY, ANNIE. WHAT DO YOU
THINK WILL HAPPEN WHEN I GO?

I MEAN,
MY FACE

WELL, I DON'T
KNOW,
WHAT ARE YOU
WORRIED WILL
HAPPEN?



THE PEOPLE. WHAT THEY
MIGHT SAY, OR DO.

WELL, PEOPLE
SAY A LOT OF THINGS.
THAT IS WHAT THEY DO.

LISTEN FREDERICK. PEOPLE ARE
USED TO HAVING THINGS A CERTAIN
WAY AND WHEN THEY FIND SOMETHING
THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND. THEY AREN'T
SURE HOW TO TAKE IT. SOMETIMES
THEY DON'T KNOW HOW TO ACT.

I'LL TELL YOU A SECRET FREDERICK; THEY TALK ABOUT ME, NOT TO MY FACE, BEHIND MY BACK.

YOU?
WHY?



BECAUSE I LIVE OUT HERE AND DO THINGS MY OWN WAY. I GUESS, AND MY LOOKS. THEY CALL ME "MANNIE", SAY I'M A MAN AND LIVE IN THE WOODS TO HIDE IT. SOMETIMES THEY LAUGH OUT LOUD WHEN I COME INTO THE STORE TO DO OUR SHOPPING, THEN THEY BLINK THEIR EYES WHEN I LOOK.

I ... I DIDN'T KNOW.
I'M SORRY.

I'M JUST SAYING, IT HAPPENS TO EVERYONE. YOU CAN'T HELP IT. USUALLY IT'S THEIR HANGUP, NOT SOMETHING YOU'VE DONE.

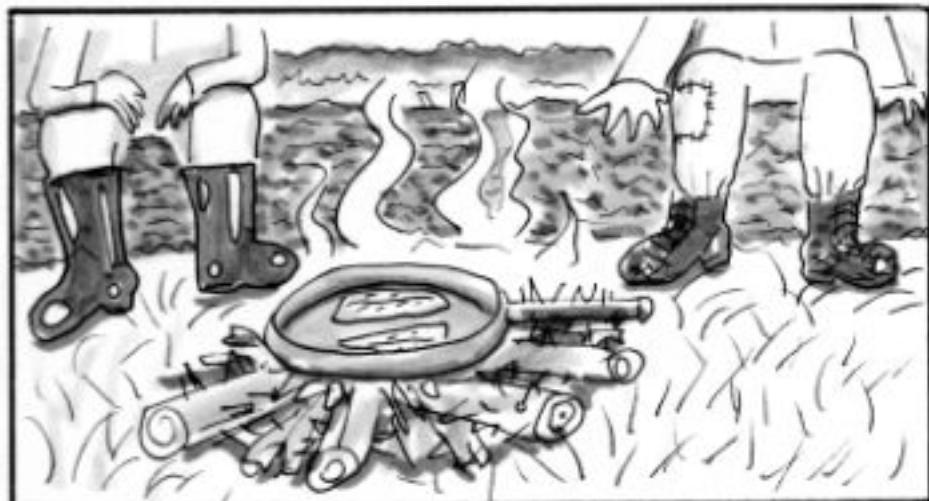


CAN...CAN YOU HELP ME? I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START. THE BANK - I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE IT IS, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO GO IN THERE OR WHAT TO ASK FOR.



THANKS. FOR EVERYTHING.





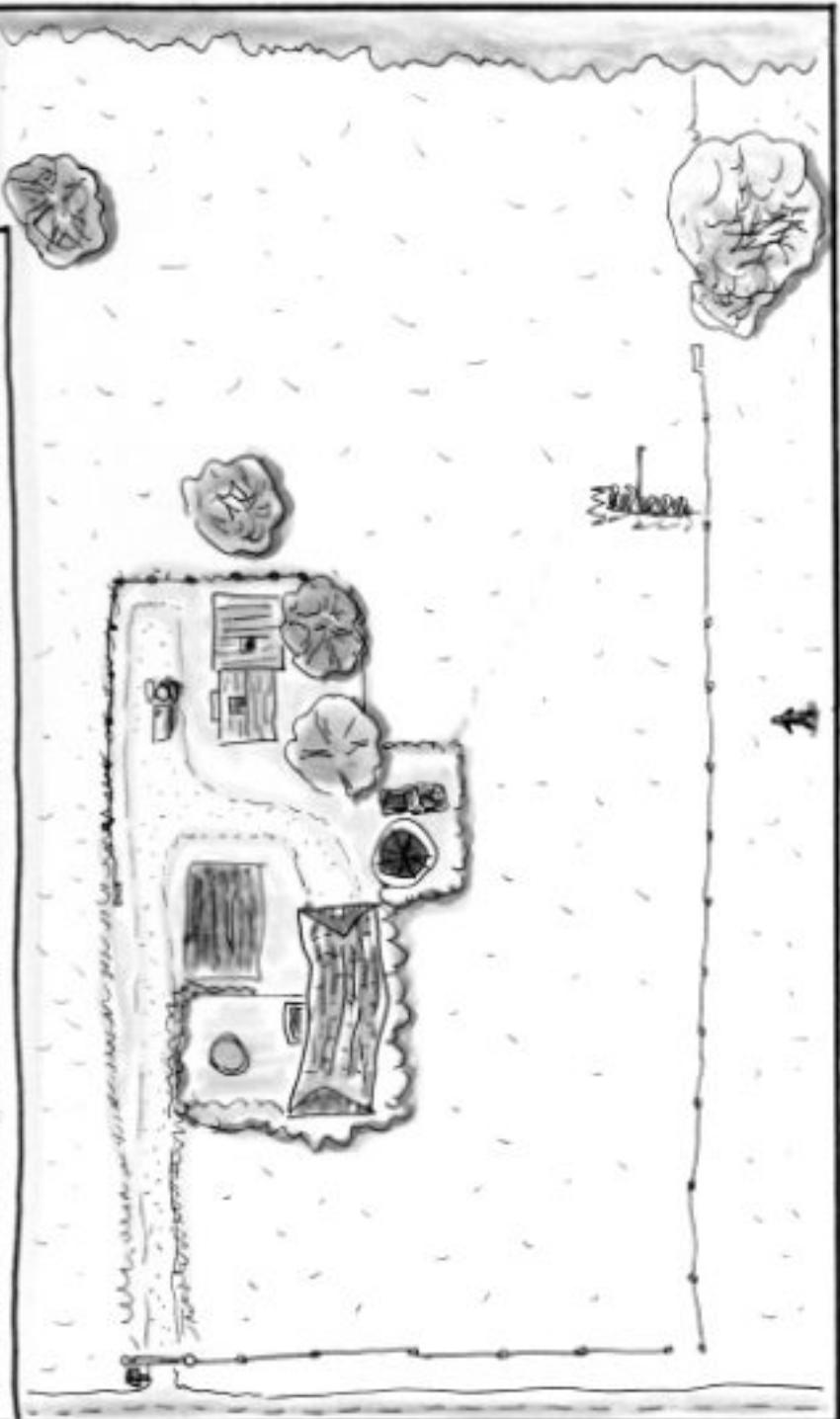
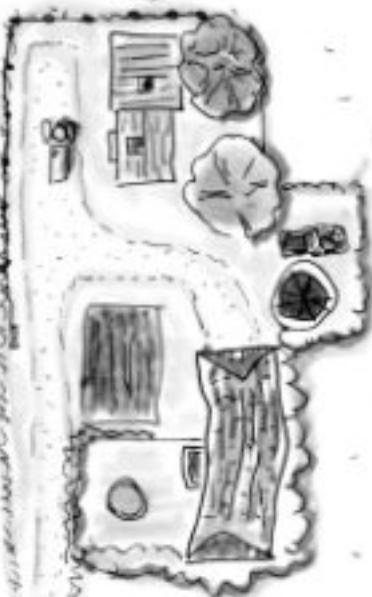
I SHOULD'VE KNOWN PEOPLE IN TOWN WOULD GIVE ANNIE A HARD TIME. TO ME SHE'S NOT DIFFERENT THOUGH, SHE'S JUST ANNIE. EVEN IF SHE WERE A MAN LIVING AS A WOMAN, I WOULDN'T CARE. SHE'S MY BEST FRIEND. BETTER TO ME THAN ANYONE, EXCEPT MY OWN MOM.

THAT NIGHT I DREAMT I WAS IN NEW YORK CITY. EVERY FACE I SAW WAS DIFFERENT. SOME EVEN LOOKED AS UNUSUAL AS MINE.



I SUDDENLY WANTED TO JOIN THE WORLD. IT CALLED TO ME FOR THE FIRST TIME.

WHAT WOULD IT REALLY MEAN FOR ME TO JOIN THE WORLD? WAS IT EVEN POSSIBLE?
HOW DOES ONE BEGIN? CAN IT BE DONE WITHOUT LOSING ONESELF?



THE ALMANAC SAYS LATE FROSTS. IT MIGHT BE GOOD YOU GOT A LATE START ON YOUR SEEDLINGS.

YUP.

YOU OKAY KID? YOU SEEM PREOCCUPIED.

JIM, I GOTTA GO TO TOWN

ANNIE'S GONNA TAKE ME



ARE - ARE YOU SURE?
WHAT FOR?

THE BILLS. I HAVE TO FIND OUT WHY THEY HAVEN'T BEEN PAID.

WELL I'D START WITH THAT LAWYER. YA KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT LAWYERS

WHAT DON'T THEY SAY ABOUT LAWYERS

HEH! YOU GOT IT!

CLACK!
UUL
TAM



SO... HOW ARE YOU GONNA DO IT?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

WELL, ARE YOU GONNA WEAR A... A VEIL OR ANYTHING?

I HADN'T THOUGHT ABOUT IT.

WHY IS HE ASKING ME THIS?

I'M SORRY, IT'S JUST... PEOPLE CAN BE CRUEL.

I MEAN, PEOPLE KNOW YOU EXIST, FRED. YOU JUST CAN'T KEEP SUCH SECRETS TOO LONG IN A TOWN AS SMALL AS OURS.

COME TO THINK OF IT...

IT'S A WONDER NO ONE'S BEEN OUT HERE BOTHERING YOU ALL THIS TIME.

MAYBE IT WAS THE BEER

CRUNCH!



IT WAS
DEFINITELY
THE STRESS
I LOST MY
TEMPER.

YOU KNOW WHAT JIM? FUCK PEOPLE!!

HORRID, NASTY
LITTLE
CREEPS

THEY'RE
THE
REAL
FREAKS

GLAD I NEVER
BEEN TO YOUR
STUPID, SHITTY
TOWN.

NOT
ME!

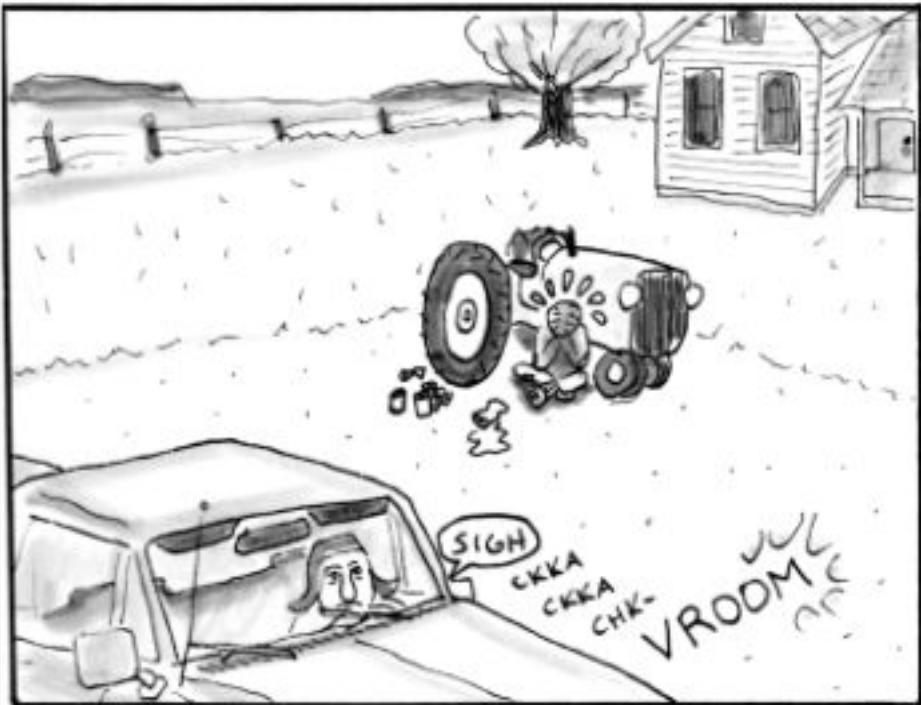
YOU THINK I WANNA GO?!

HELL NO, I DON'T! I WANNA
STAY HERE WHERE

NOBODY,

NOT EVEN YOU,
CAN SEE ME.

INFAC
Y'KNOW
WHAT JIM?
YOU SHOULD GO.
I'M NOT
FEELIN'
SO HOT...



HI FREDERICK, I'M MAGGIE,
JIM'S WIFE. THIS IS OUR
DAUGHTER PERSEPHONE.

HEY!

I KNOW WE'VE NEVER MET
BEFORE BUT JIM IS REALLY
SORRY ABOUT YESTERDAY.
WE THOUGHT IT WAS TIME WE
CAME AND MET YOU, AND WE
BROUGHT YOU SOME CHILI.

SPLITTING
HANGOVER/
CRYING
HEADACHE

THANKS!

OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS I PREPARED, PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY. I GATHERED ALL THE PAPERS I COULD FIND, INCLUDING MOTHER'S WILL AND ALL THE PAPERS THE LAWYER HAD BROUGHT ME IN A YELLOW ENVELOPE. I EVEN DUG OUT MY BIRTH CERTIFICATE TO PROVE IT WAS ME.



I WASHED MY NEATEST CLOTHES AND SINCE MY REGULAR BOOTS WERE SO SCUFFED AND BATTERED, I DECIDED TO WEAR MY NEW RUBBER BOOTS. I CHOSE MY HAT WITH FLAPS AND A LIGHT SCARF, YES, JUST IN CASE I WANTED TO HIDE MYSELF.



I LOOKED LIKE A FARMER, LIKE JIM. WOULD THAT BE ENOUGH TO NOT STAND OUT MORE THAN I ALREADY WOULD?

THE DAY FINALLY ARRIVED WHEN I WENT TO TOWN FOR THE FIRST TIME.



WELL, IT SEEMS THE ATTORNEY - YOUR DAD'S BROTHER, HAS PASSED AWAY. BUT YOU HAVE ALL YOUR DOCUMENTATION. WE CAN TRANSFER CONTROL OF THE ACCOUNTS TO YOU, FREDERICK

UNCLE? DIED? AND NO ONE TOLD ME?



IT WAS NEWS TO ME AS WELL.
BURT BECAME A SHUT-IN OVER
THE LAST FEW YEARS.

MY CONDOLENCES ABOUT YOUR MOTHER. WE WENT TO HIGH SCHOOL TOGETHER, LOOK FREDERICK, I KNOW THIS MUST NOT HAVE BEEN EASY COMING HERE. WE'LL DO WHATEVER WE CAN TO HELP YOU.

THANKS
GARY.



AFTER THAT DAY I FELT LIKE ANYTHING WAS POSSIBLE. THE URGE TO HIDE, THAT MIGHT NEVER FADE. MY DESIRE TO KEEP TO MY WORLD OF THE NOT CHANGE. ME SHIFTED GREW A SENSE

FARM AND FORESTS WOULD BUT SOMETHING WITHIN FOREVER AND WITH IT OF CURIOSITY.





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