

Right Hand

It's not going to get better - he's not going to get better. What does it mean to really understand this statement?
It is hard.

Grief is strange. Why do I cry? I know I am sad, but why does that mean I cry? Why does it mean that my chest heaves and that I gasp for air or suddenly suck in shuddering breaths? What is the purpose of crying? Why has my body decided or why has it been decided for my body by millenia of evolution that this is the way to manifest and move with grief.

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I drove up to the Right Hand drop in. The same spot that I believe *he* went for his very last walk. Then *he* could still walk. His walking, like aging others I know, seemed to correspond inversely to his talking. We would start out at quite quickly and then after a minute or two he would start talking to me and we would gradually slow until we were barely walking and then, as if waking up, he would become aware of our slow pace and ask me whether it was he or I that had slowed down so much. And we would again charge forward and repeat this process. As we walked back, the sun having set over the valley cliffs but still catching the underside of the clouds above us and turning the entire valley into a bath of grapefruit pink light, we slowed again and he asked me for the frame drum I was carrying for him. He held it up and sang into it. As I stood to his left and East, he was cast against the dusky valley wall, bathed in the pink bath of light.

It's not going to get better - he's not going to get better. How do you really understand this statement? It is hard.

Sun having set we walked in a valley of shadow, lit indirectly above. Stopped there, I saw him standing against the backdrop of darkness. I asked if we could go back and quickly, I was cold. This was not a step in recovery, this was his last walk - a last step. He did not get better.

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Again.

I drove to the drop in to Right Hand. By myself. I descended this time into the valley instead of walking the path along its rim. I took the right path. Across from me sandstone fins rose up. With woe worn face, breaths lurched out of me and my face burned. Reaching the water at the bottom of the canyon, I reversed and walked downstream, looking for a place to cross and follow a path up the other side. I found a parting in the grasses of the stream and leaped across it. (The Styx? Perhaps.) I was now on the side less hiked. I took off my shoes. Barefoot, I followed another path, one I did not know. Ankle height prickly pear cacti crept onto the trail and my feet flowed past them. In the shadows of the last one, a single spine found my foot. I stopped and removed it, a slight pain, slighter still in grief.

And before me a rock face.



Weight and scale
pressed upon the spirit through

proximity.

Shearing and cleaving marks worn soft from time. A patchwork of dark oxidations and pale sandstone. And marks, chips defacing the rock wall. Bullet blasted craters, letters and initials but, there, faint in the light rock,

figures.

Of sheep and people.

Of a chain of people,

standing hand

in hand

holding their neighbor,

fading with light mark

on light stone

until it was my mind only that saw them,

hand in hand the chain continuing.

He opened and moved his eyes slightly, seemed to try and look at me as I sat down in the chair beside the hospital bed that he now lay on in the living room. His right hand was wrapped around the bed's railing and I laid my hand over his and held it, hoping and with faith that touch would be meaningful for him. I didn't know what to say. (Do *you* ever?) I usually choose to be quiet but having been told that it is good to just talk even, or perhaps particularly, when the other cannot.

I told him about our life recently:

- her radio show,
- that I would bring some of the music she had played next time I came.
- That I had started working at moonflower,
- that we had moved,
- that family had visited,
- and that they loved him and thought about him.

I thanked him for taking the time to spend with me the past couple months - a knotted thanks because I knew I was thanking him for something he was thankful for and because my thank you also held my regret for not having been there more.

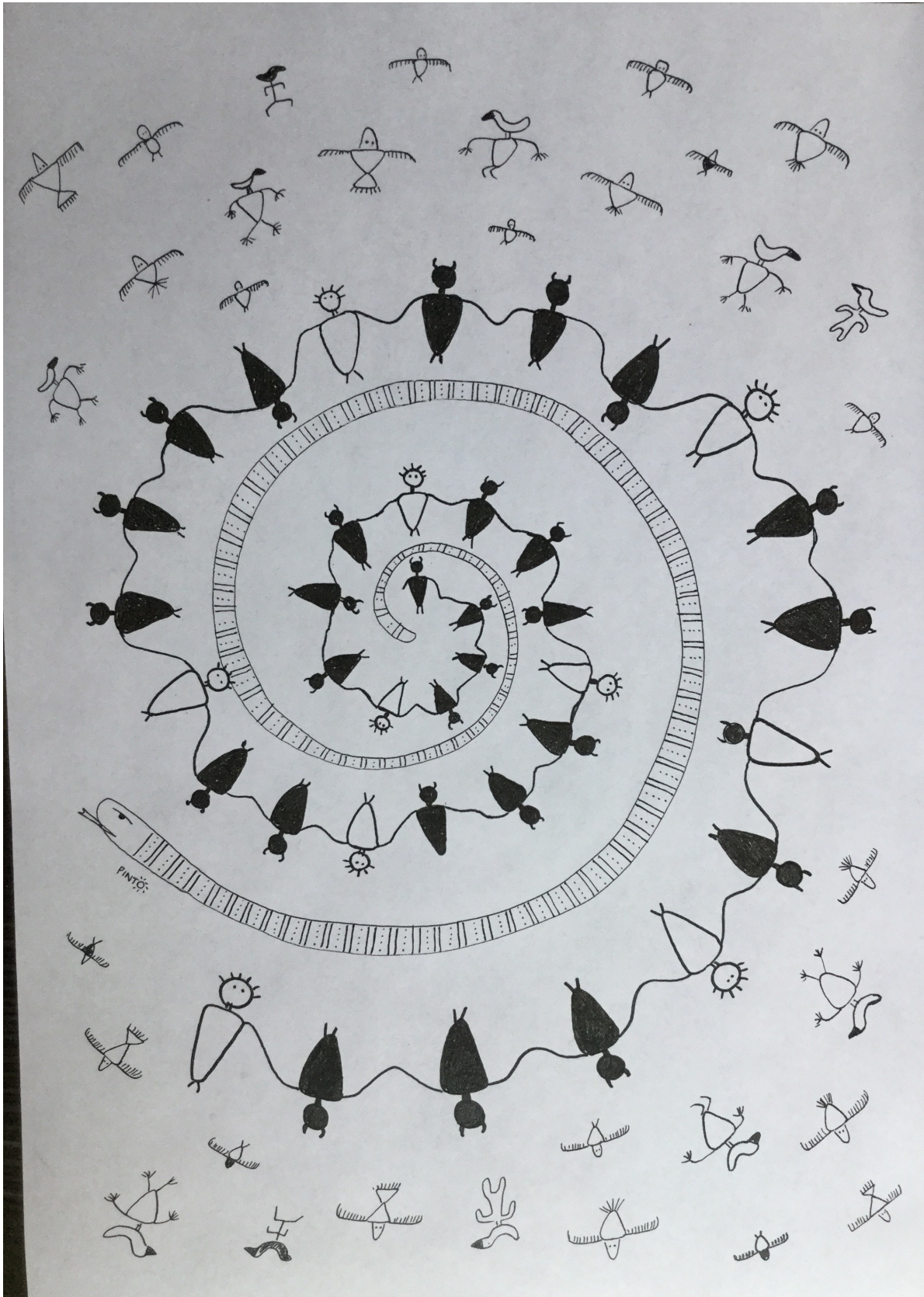
Thanks also as apology.

I can always regret more. (I think we can always regret more.) But when does it matter? When is it good to?

I held his hand and thanked him, thankful that we had walked together again, that he had sang into his frame drum, that we had gotten into the oversized Nissan SUV since it was the only set of surround speakers available and been bowled over by choral music. Thankful that he had given me the first Harry Potter book so many years before and thankful that I was able to hold his hand now.

Memories -

of hands
holding hands
holding loved ones
-
held in rock.



I climbed barefoot. Body and earth. Soul and rock. Soft and solid.

The flat path of the past
now rose up before me as a rock face.

The route climbed up from my feet, into my sight, and to my mind as I searched for the
next step and
the step after, the step after, the step after
that.

My route filled my mind, challenged me,
not to slip,
to ensure my weight was held,
that skin against stone stuck, supporting me.

This was familiar, this I knew. I could see the consequences of falling, of coming up short but I knew that I would
not.

I knew this,
I knew my body,
I knew this stretched it, and
I knew it could do this.

I slipped and

it caught me.

It shook and I rested it. I edged myself between faces, inching up and it held me. I reached the top and from high
upon a fin I sat and sang.

Full fathom five/
My father lies/
Of his bones/
Is coral made

I looked in his direction. I pushed the words out on the air, into currents that might bear their slight waves to
him. That he might hear my voice from the rocks - this place he surely climbed as have others, though not many
- this place which was but one of the unnumbered that he knew.

Down the fins, off the rocks, I followed the sandy path to the creek. I had jumped the stream before. Now it was
time that I walk through it.

The Styx makes sense.

The water jarring. My attention changed.

I stood in a different state and that state clung to my feet as I ducked through bushes and scrub and found the
sandy path on the other side. I dropped my shoes onto the ground and slid my feet back into them.

I was back,
town was on this side, people,
and him, here,
not for long,

no - longer.

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