

ANDREW JOHNSON

Perhaps One Day This Will All Make Sense

In the meantime, nothing of any significance happens along the way, nothing worth mentioning, at least in proportion to expectation.

Just the same house on the same block. Same kitchen, same countertops, appliances, utensils, same way of harnessing fire to make the meal. Same plumbing, same pipes set at slight angles, leaning the liquid in and out. Same windows letting in light, same squares of sunshine sliding back east all afternoon across the floor.

Here we are again with the same four seasons. Again with the summertime butterflies applauding some event we can't see, the slow formation of beads along brow lines, salt streaks left on shirtsleeves. Again with the autumn and all the usual reasons for thanks, turning finished fields like folding palms in a lap, haloes on harvest moons, the sputtering sounds of children shooting like sparks from school yards and blazing home. Again the winter, the darkening daylight, snowflakes landing and interlocking on our paths, our packing in closer merely for warmth, the turning of a year like palms slowly unfolding again. Again with springtime, again here comes another opening. Just as we knew it would.

Another day in the light of our star, another night in the dome of a thousand other stars, a thousand other suns that spin their own worlds

around the rooms of their systems, the same gravity in varying degrees pulling and pushing, the same speed the light must travel to reach our eyes, the same path a star will follow from white dwarf to red giant to black and gone, the same inability of ours to tell if a distant star is still burning or already dead.

Nothing new forming in our bodies, just the usual offspring with their chanced beginnings, their rapid splitting of cells, growing on the end of a placenta cord like a blown balloon, base-level turning of mother's food into skin, bone, lungs, heart, mind, soul. The usual way mother can feel, can know, can open, deliver, bring, birth, the way the sightless newborn will claw and crawl over the vacated womb, open its mouth wide, latch, suck, drink, and live. Nothing new but the usual rearing, the growth, the launching of one more mind, a balloon floating over a landscape, one individual mind bright and buoyant, just one more with a mind of its own.

Same buildings with doors that open into lobbies, identical stairs leading upward as usual and predictably back down. Same bodies more or less, moving these minds about, or the other way around, either way, no matter. Same blank page with negotiable margins and the standard array of possibilities. Same new day.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Hypothetical Conversation

When I sat down with Mom at the kitchen table, I reached out to hold her hand, which I don't remember ever doing before, and I started to say what I came to say, that I'd been concerned and I thought she'd been brainwashed, but she started speaking first and said, "Son, I've been concerned, I think you've been brainwashed," and I started to say I was about to say the same thing, but I looked in her eyes and could see that she already knew it, so I quickly grabbed her arm at the elbow, then her other arm the same way, then she also grabbed my arms, and we stood there, arms and eyes locked, slightly leaning in to one another, and neither of us could tell if we were fighting or trying to escape.

ANDREW JOHNSON

Tangled Up

Who knows why joy?

Or, more to the point: why joy? Never mind the knowing, just the wonder. The *wonder* of joy.

And all over this: an evening outside with my four-year-old son, fishing at a city pond, sun glowing westward, a young couple feeding ducks nearby, the peace. But no, that's just the norm, what's expected in such a time and place. More precisely, over this: the elderly black man parked near the pond, lounging in his passenger seat, door open, feet propped all the way through the window of the open door, and his radio playing Bob Dylan's "Tangled Up In Blue" loud enough for us to hear from the pond's opposite end. That's the source, yes, but how, or why, who knows?

Yes, of course, the setting: the sunset, the pond, the boy, the casting out, the couple. Yes, the ducks. Yes, the orange-brushed clouds reflecting on the surface. The willow swaying above the bridge. All this, yes, contributing factors, but the source? No. My body, something in it, tethered across the pond to a point I cannot see in the air, somewhere around the man's open door, the source is there.

Yes, the background: my son knows of Dylan, *likes* Dylan, and knows this song. And the ego, the pride: *My son likes Dylan*. Shake it off, shake it off. That's not it.

And yes, the oddity. The oddity of *elderly*

black man with *Dylan*. Not the expected: white and well-aged boomer, surly twenty-something in slim pants, or whoever else might fit that unfair equation: This Artist + This Fan = Sense. Oddities can be reconciled, explained: his license plates, when I passed by earlier, said Louisiana, and he's old enough to be from the Civil Rights Era South, old enough to know Dylan — no, to *have known* Dylan — as folk hero, the one wafting revolution into the air. Unlike me, too young, not having such a *have known*. Only a *know of*, or *know by way of*. If that's the case, he has more credibility listening to Dylan than I do, and the oddity turns out to be me. But why this pull to make sense when all I want is the joy? Such narrative is my creation, not his, and without verification, without initiating conversation and getting around to asking him how Dylan, my assumptions are always self-told lies, and such narrative is fiction, is always fiction, and I think I really believe it, so I say it again to shake it off my mind: the narrative is always fiction. It isn't the thing itself. So.

Another way to get at asking why: Of all that has emerged from a bang and into this world — gills, rocks, gunshots, hexagons, parsnips, hill top races, soft metals, snowflakes, bowties, eyeballs — why joy?

Shake everything else, shake explanation,

background, setting — etc., — shake all. All. And just look at this: the joy remains. *Remains!*

Or regardless, to be thankful. Not thankful *to*, but *for*. For the joy itself, for the capacity to contain it somehow here. No really, pointing now—*here*.

Thankful for, but not to. Thankful *to* doesn't fit anymore. *To* requires a whom, and who is the whom, or Whom? Or better yet: Thou? There seems to be fewer traces of a Thou, at least one who can hear. What of a Thou so *other* it cannot, *must* not have ears, have eyes, have anything that resembles our creaturely *I*. But why? Can Thou hear me? Such trouble. Is this not the trouble

with being thankful *to*? But thankful *for* is the thing itself, the sinking into, the exquisitely-felt terrain before subject arrives at object. Such arrival requires the journey's end, and who wants this to end? *This!* The day's limit caught and tangled up in my wild-cast line. *This!* Even if there is a Whom, can't I withhold from the *to*? Or can gratitude somehow be to *by* for?

To by way of for, I mean. The observing is the receiving, and isn't that enough? Trouble, such trouble. For all I know, just thankful for. But never mind, never mind. Mind doesn't seem to house this joy anyway; so shake this off all over again. Remain, remain, remain, and remain! 