

10. Hooked on Hell in the Land of Golden Promises

When I present this scene, when I consciously go about the task of improving it and bringing it to life, it is not without the feeling that I'm rescuing and even redeeming the unfinished play from which it was taken. From the collection of notes I kept over a number of years.¹ Yet such is of course how my writerly situation as a whole is being played out and, most particularly, with this essay's attempt to take it all in.²

This admission, the one of trying to redeem my failed career as a writer, brings to mind yet another that should be made or at least I think should be made and judged more sophisticated. Just thinking this admission should be made is of course yet another complication which is that of a doubt or hesitation. Of not being able to, in the final analysis, rule out the possibility of this admission's being, at one end of the scale, more sophistic than the first or, at the other, more sophomoric. I can't rule this out any more than I can rule out the possibility of overplaying or underplaying my intellectual hand at any moment. This second admission is perhaps only that the first doesn't necessarily cover or justify or take note of *all* incidents of attempted redemption. In which case this highly personal essay called *On Truthtelling*, despite its mandate to be personal, always runs the risk of introducing personal or perhaps what I should call *micro*-personal elements that fall outside its formal aims and intentions. To turn these elements into a tolerated and even forgotten residue is essentially what is demanded of the writerly process. A juggling act which, in the case of the quasi-play called *Hooked on Hell in the Land of Golden Promises*, combines rewriting a crucial scene with zeroing in on a strange and even aberrant form of truthtelling.

How much it amazed us all in Winnipeg when we first got word of my brother's breakdown. It came in the form of a long-distance phone call and a bizarre and piecemeal story (though my sister related it with her customary self-control), the upshot of which was that the police had found my brother wandering in the desert just outside Palm Springs, dehydrated and completely out of his mind. Then, as the first sign of what turned out to be a remarkably quick recovery, he called us two days later from the psychiatric hospital where he had been temporarily admitted and where, as I learned later, he had had some strange hallucinations. I asked him how he was getting on and received a chilling response. In a matter-of-fact voice he told me that, although he had just been through hell, he knew there was a God and Jesus Christ was his Saviour.

After he was released from the hospital and sent back to Winnipeg, I had the

chance to hear the full story. One of my first reactions was to lose faith in the explanation that had come from the examining doctor by way of my sister and blamed his psychosis on LSD flashbacks. To be sure, I had no reason to think that drugs weren't a contributing factor just as I had no reason to think that some comparable experiences – heat stroke while spending time with Charlie at the beach, talking to a Christian fundamentalist who ardently believed in the devil, and experiencing an earth tremor while sleeping on the tenth floor of a high-rise – hadn't broken down some of his defences. But the more I talked with my brother, the more I became convinced that something more fundamental was lurking below even the most disturbing and dramatic of these psychical shakeups. Something that he was hardly conscious of and yet was heavily freighted in a moral sense. Something that had to do with purging himself of certain lies and deceptions that had accumulated and threatened to fall on his head.

Something that ended up running its course perversely because truth-telling itself had lost its head. How else to characterize this usually vaunted principle and practise, this thing called telling the truth, when it is totally oblivious to consequences and fixed upon one point to the exclusion of all others? When it swells up at one particular instant and bears itself painfully in much the same way a boil does that needs to be lanced? When it tries to justify itself simply by claiming that it arises out of a good intention? And when it cannot relate this intention to any other, good or bad, save the one it is meant to nullify or offset? The presumably evil intention that my brother attributed to Charlie when she repeatedly threatened to tell Laura about the adulterous relationship between her and Sutton – this was, according to him, what was behind his precipitous act of forestalling her by doing it himself and, as he insisted, provided its justification.

That he should finally take the initiative and remove this threat by acting as he did seemed to him an unshakeable point of honour. His thinking on the matter, so far as I could determine it (and so far as it was thinking), was that Laura would be spared the worst if she got the news *from him*. That is, from a presumably calm rational brother as opposed to a hysterical vindictive woman. As far as his own complicity goes, both in terms of being Sutton's collaborator and party to the deception, it simply didn't register. Or at least nothing he told me bore any sign of his feeling culpable in the area where most people would have seen the greatest culpability. In truth, he had been practising the art of deceiving women for some time and so, with respect to what Sutton was up to, he was obviously not in a very strong position. What further weakened it and ultimately made it untenable was the close relationship between him and Sutton both on and off the job as well as

the perks and favours the latter had bestowed on him.

It won't do to think that I can explain my brother's irrational behaviour in its entirety. Perhaps I should have been more mindful of this when I was trying to deal with it as a playwright. Then I would have seen that the devil onstage doing commentary was all wrong. I would have at the same time been more sensitive to what was truly required, namely, a portrayal of the sort of reasoning that goes off the rails well before the first signs of psychosis.

With respect to my brother's case, it would have had to be a portrayal of the sort of reasoning that can take conflicting values or principles from a relatively benign setup (where they merely collide off rather than into one another) and, in conjunction with circumstance, set them up as a powerful opposition that dares not even recognize itself.

That my brother loved and respected my sister I have no doubt. That he believed he was showing this love and respect by acting as he did I also have no doubt. Neither then nor later did I ever entertain the slightest suspicion that he didn't act with the noblest of intentions. Yet from top to bottom he carried out a false move (so I believed then and so I believe now) and, even when I brought this to his attention, he refused to recognize it.

In order to carry on the art of deceiving women with a good conscience, my brother relied on a sort of highly personalized and truncated consequentialist argument. Instead of dwelling upon the bad consequences that usually spring from acts of deception, he strictly confined himself to what seemed to flow good or ill from his relationships with women. And since he managed to pull the wool over the eyes of most without causing undue harm or mischief, the pleasure he received and gave counted for him as an overall gain and sum result.

With respect to Sutton's infidelity, it is quite likely my brother experienced an initial discomfort or embarrassment that quickly got laughed off. Then a later oppression that, on account of various elements and interests of the most heady sort, failed to arise to the forefront of his thoughts. As I imagine it now, all for him in California was a kind of fast-talking fast-paced material heaven from which the little bit of hell within him looked small and insignificant. A business chatter constantly pumping him up (but wasn't he pumped up already?), a vast array of ongoing stimuli impressing upon him the seemingly endless wealth, power, elegance, and convenience of an exciting California lifestyle. Moreover, an equally endless number of

encounters with women who were not averse to his brazen and sometimes even braying way of putting himself across – all these factors must have taken him away from some part of himself that, under such conditions, he felt he had the right to disvalue and discredit.

I cannot help but think that this part of him was his love and respect for his sister. Here was something that, though he dared not recognize it, transcended sexual identity and, indeed, sexual love and was therefore closer to friendship and a principle of non-deception. Such being the case, I doubt very much that he could have avoided moments of a deeper self-examination. Moments in which it would have been a veritable agony to see how much faith his sister had in her husband. Where he would have caught a glimpse of Sutton's darker side and seen how it had infiltrated and taken possession of him.

A question that seems to pose itself now is what makes the difference between the person who is drawn into evil and maintains his equilibrium and the one who doesn't. Immediately I find myself thinking of a cherished self-identity that is ruptured because, in opposition to the numerous cases of people going off the rails morally but not otherwise, the evil that is being enjoyed or instrumentalized cannot be ritually and routinely purged of its grosser aspects. With such a delicate and vulnerable self-identity as eventually falters and possibly collapses, the evil that radically endangers it is therefore never accompanied by a camaraderie or confederacy or, for that matter, *collegiality* so powerful as to sufficiently alter it in a both damning and saving sense. Had my brother ended up with a hundred Sutton-like characters chanting around him in flowing robes the mantra of an open, hedonistic lifestyle, it is not likely he would have found it necessary to tell the truth to Laura. On the contrary, he would have been more likely to have opted for joining Sutton in the big lie that would have kept her from giving any credence to Charlie. The latter would have then become, as is so often the case, the victim of a reasoning that gives a blessing even to the worst.

And what was my brother's self-identity if not that of, apart from being an ambitious and success-oriented person, an honest, affable, and fun-loving one? Everything that went down as lies to women was whitewashed by this fun-loving part and all the rest was credited to his good conscience as the telling of the truth to family, friends, neighbours, and the like. Not telling the truth to his sister put him then on a middle ground that was both a shaking and yet not a breaking of his self-image. The last in the sense that, so far as not telling the truth to her didn't involve telling lies, he likely kept up his robust all-around good opinion of himself. The first in the sense that, so far

as he couldn't avoid knowing that he wasn't being honest with her, there was some internal discomfort and distress that he continually had to repress.

On the basis of the way I see it now, a number of factors then came into play that combined the threat of a brutal confrontation with the threat of repressed truth suddenly running amok and registering its power and authority. Specifically, a confrontation with his sister that would have had him cornered and in danger of giving himself over to the most unsettling of self-confrontations.

Laura: Do you mean to tell me you saw this going on for three months and not once did you say to him: "This is wrong"?

How could my brother have blocked out all thought of such a possible confrontation? How could he not have had at least an inkling of the devastating critique and condemnation he would have been susceptible to?

Laura: Do you know what you've done? By going along with this, by being party to it, by not opening up your mouth even once to protest his infidelity, by not saying a word to me so that I might've at least suspected it, and by in fact doing everything in your power so that I wouldn't suspect it, you put me in the same category as those girls you cheat on. You didn't make the slightest distinction between them and me.

Ultimately my brother did make the distinction but in such a way that, instead of its arising out of a confrontation with himself, it arose out of *avoiding* it. Presumably holding up a mirror to himself would have been intolerable without some profound shakeup and restructuring of his personality. But since he was basically content with himself and his way of life, he was ultimately driven towards a haphazard and indeed hazardous confrontation with others. Ultimately this dramatically altered his situation and made it even more extraordinary (indeed, to the point of otherworldliness) than it would have been simply as a sexual intrigue. Yet in a complicated and hardly to be expected way, this extraordinariness itself was the means by which his values and principles were never given more than a temporary shakeup.

Out of a habitual practise of deception then arose a nearly disastrous form of self-deception. The whole moral weight of his involvement in the affair was thrown into the irrational sphere by his attempt to realign himself with truth while swimming in a sea of falsity. That is, by clinging to the idea of telling

the truth to his sister apart from all other considerations. Surely then a psychological movement was afoot that, being hard pressed and assaulted by other forces, was ripe for disintegration. Never having properly told the truth to himself, what navigational instruments did he have so that he could have ridden out the storm of telling the truth to others with virtually no confirmation of this truth by those to whom he was closest?

Enter the demonic element at this point. I suspect there were more than a few out-of-the-ordinary experiences that precipitated my brother towards a vision of evil vastly more personal, intimate, and intense than anything he had imagined before. The latter no doubt was what popular culture affords to all and even the not-so-well-informed. But whereas police shows and Westerns tend to express an optimistic and even humane view of the opposition between the powers of darkness and the forces of light, science fiction and horror films tend to give it an inhuman cast (even if there is still the ultimate triumph of good over evil). War movies and gangster films, on the other hand, tend to give evil a more pervasive character. Here it often seems to gain an ascendancy in human affairs and threaten to take them over. Yet however much such harrowing visions penetrate us and stay with us at some level, we normally treat them as having little to do with the world we inhabit. This is no doubt what my brother's situation was for a long time. A middling student of life in most respects, he nonetheless kept a good head on his shoulders until the ominous signs of a great lesson gathered that put the distinction between illusion and reality on trial.

How much my brother likely believed in and counted on his good will and intentions! Had he not taken note of and approved them until they had become a kind of personal creed and ground for faith? And wasn't this creed, this faith, this fettering of himself for being well-intentioned, this naive but not uncommon way of constituting a moral identity, mixed up with his conception of the world at large? If so, then the threat to this identity must have been a threat to his world. It must have functioned like the epicentre of an earthquake and sent out shock waves to all parts of it.

At the same time a sense of panic must have gripped him when, for the first time, he lost confidence in himself. When he saw his good intentions in a new and terrible light and when, however briefly, he recognized them to be false friends and flatterers. Then it must have come as a strange sort of relief when, taking his anxiety out into the world, he met with all the signs of a far greater malignancy. When the discovery of it in himself gave way to the discovery of it in the world. When the latter increased its horrifying hold on him until the former was lost to sight. When he came to view himself as

being even more removed from evil and more in opposition to it than ever before. And when he came to see in the world all the signs of a general good will that was not simply naive, inept, or deceptive, but duplicitous to the very core. All that was scurrilous in business, in pleasure, in the various pursuits and diversions of his quasi-Hollywoodian existence now leapt into his imagination as the very essence of human affairs. Rapacity, exploitation, deception, collusion, betrayal, vengeance – all these elements came to the fore as primary characteristics of the world whose greatest feat was to appear otherwise. Now my brother, with a brain overheated with sun or religion or movies or drugs or earthquakes or possibly a combination of all these, started to show signs of being psychotic even before he confronted Sutton. Already it had come to him that there was a principle of evil at work and that, moreover, this principle was demonic in nature and capable of immense displays of power.

Now whether these ideas were the cause or effect of my brother's hallucinations or whether they were now one now the other in a kind of snowballing effect, they came from a tradition of thought that certainly doesn't take itself to be wayward. On the contrary, a principle of telling the truth is consistently evoked in this tradition that, however much it is grounded in faith, never goes without what is presumed to be both fact and argument. To the extent then that it abstracts and objectifies evil as a subject, it must rely on a countervailing principle that is operative or at least taken to be operative in this very telling. In my brother's case, however, this more intellectual way of coming to the phenomenon seems to have been short-circuited by the lack of such a countervailing principle.

To have the belief in radical evil and not be entirely paralysed or taken over by it requires the belief in radical good. Up to the time that my brother accidentally encountered a fundamentalist Christian – a fellow who, as he told me later, had his master's degree in theology and who engaged him in an intense discussion on religious matters – his overall view of goodness was at best quasi-epicurean. It was essentially his willingness to go after the pleasures of life with a good-natured vivacity that seemed to be the sum total of his scruples. But with the way things turned out for him in California, such an outlook quickly ran into trouble and, along with proving to be too light for what he encountered there, was probably challenged and criticized from the outside.

All of this likely happened in such a compressed space of time that, before he could ever get around to his "Well, I know one thing, there's a God and Jesus Christ is my Saviour," his belief in radical evil had its window of

opportunity to flare up, enlarge itself drastically, and assume cosmic proportions. The remarkable speed with which this storm gathered, broke, and then passed from the scene of his life is proof of its being rooted in the duplicity, adultery, and threatened disclosure that marked out his life in California. All of a sudden the greatest malignancy and danger were perceived in what was most familiar and close to him and, for at least the duration of one night's harrowing drive around Los Angeles and then out towards Palm Springs (not to mention the stay in the psychiatric hospital), associated with powerful and sinister forces of a ubiquitous nature.

At this point I feel I must register my uneasiness with respect to all I have been saying about this matter and how it seems to drift away from my subject. Although drifting *is* my subject to the extent that it belongs to both the nature of myself and the nature of truth-telling, I must fight against it to the extent that truth-telling can neither exist without order nor without the ideal of a perfect order. When the latter isn't implicated in a systematic or theoretic form of truth-telling, it must be implicated in an aesthetic one. Something like a work of art that strives for the greatest diversity in its bid for unity and completeness. So it is that taking up the case of my brother's experience in California fits in with my subject insofar as this case is a limit case, an example of truth-telling in its most aberrant form. And just as the irrational-cum-supernatural aspect of this troubled me when I first looked into it as a struggling playwright, so it does now even though I sense its proximity to the rational and natural.

My brother's nightmarish hallucinations were so vivid that, even after he had returned to Winnipeg, he continued to think – at least for a time – that they were not simply figments of his imagination. However, I suspect that, when they first started, he took them as such and attributed them to various natural causes. But when they continued to such a degree that it was virtually impossible for him to separate them from the circumstances he was in as well as ongoing events, the need for a better explanation, a rational enough move in itself, arose and precipitated him towards madness. Perhaps this rational-cum-irrational explanation first came to him as a hypothesis even though it was presented to him in the form of a certitude. Which is to say that there was little in my brother's background or general outlook on life to make him lose all scepticism in the face of a religious explanation. An explanation that, despite this initial scepticism, must have been interpreted by him later as a preordained message. One that first came to him when, after he had experienced his hallucinations on the beach, after he had soaked up too much sun as it seems and imagined the small children who belonged to one of Charlie's friends to be talking as crudely and

vindictively as the adults, he ran into a stranger who told him there was a war going on for the possession of his soul.

Stranger: It's th'only way, brother. Look, yuh kin't ignore that sumpin' big has jus' happen'd in your life. It's partly on account of what's bin goin' on here in California and partly on account of what's bin left out even from the time you were livin' in Canada. Now in the first case I'd say it's 'bout a lack of prudence and – not meaning to offend you – a lack of backbone in confrontin' your brother-in-law over his immoral activities. And in the second case, well, it's clear and simple. It's a lack of Jesus.

Jason: Let me think about it.

Stranger: Brother, yuh'll just be givin' the devil more opportunities to drag yuh down. It's not thinkin' that's goin' to help yuh now. It's prayin'.

One thing I tried to recapture in my dramatic reconstruction of the telephone call to Palm Springs is that he was so severely shaken and upset by the turn of events that he broke down emotionally. It was in this state of mind that he left Charlie's apartment, drove around Los Angeles for several hours, and, as his turmoil subsided, reasoned his way into madness. True to the theologian's words, things had gotten worse and with such lightening speed that his normal life was now being lived like a nightmare. Not so easy was it then to think of the hallucinations on the beach as one thing and the hallucinatory-like call to Palm Springs another. Nor to think that what was closest and most familiar to him had not become implicated in a general evil whose range and power, not to mention its source, had only begun to be revealed to him.

When danger is merely a possibility, however remote, it is enough to make us imagine it, under certain circumstances, breathing down our very necks. Usually we can escape the rising terror by taking the necessary steps to change our situation or our perspective. In my brother's case, however, neither one nor the other was possible in that, once he had become lost, once he had begun to suspect that people were giving him wrong directions, that they were doing so wilfully, that their intention was malicious, that supernatural forces were at play here and elsewhere, and that, finally, even his car was under their control, he was effectively lost every other way. For it was then that terror struck him not simply as a response to a perceived threat or imminent danger but to the growing awareness that an enemy was

abroad so powerful and uncanny as to be able to peer into his very soul, play upon his worst fears, and undermine his innermost defences. Gone then all faith in some technical or psychological way of stemming the tide of horrific feelings. As the belief in being hopelessly trapped pulled into its orbit the evidence of this and as the evidence accumulated and turned belief into objective truth, he was thrown from the realm of natural explanations into the realm of supernatural ones.

If the first onslaught of terror, like a vast wave, threw up supernatural explanations and washed away natural ones, it must have also carried all other thoughts out to sea. Driving about for stretches like a maniac or lapsing into a zombie-like state, ranting and raving in his dementia or crying and sobbing in his delusions, how did my brother manage to keep control of his car except by reflex and conditioned response? But no matter how much this held good for him, surely he would have broken down while he was driving around in the city and possibly ended up in the hospital much earlier than he did if it weren't for some mitigating factor. Some fortuitous incident or other that came along even in the depths of his despair and even when he suffered from the full horror of knowing that hell had risen from the ground and taken over the city, its nightlife, its environs, and the dark sky overhead where prayers failed to ascend. When there was no doubt in his mind that every person he asked or might think to ask for directions was a subtle and conniving agent who had betrayed his humanity at the behest of the devil. When he envisioned the same fate for himself and, panic-stricken, tried to outrun it. When his frenzy would have either exhausted him and rendered him comatose or else sent him careening off the road. Then, I suspect, something happened that diminished his terror and returned him to a kind of reason. Something like a miraculous escape that he could only put down to an intervening power, a hand from above that, according to its own good purpose, had reached into hell and shown itself.

Yet hell still remained in place for him, all its dangers extraordinarily alive, and if no longer a hopeless trap, still a no man's land to try and test him to the uttermost. What more could he have possibly needed at this critical juncture of his life than a surge of confidence and belief in himself, the will or resolution to outrun the fate of being annihilated rather than simply giving way to a mad flight from it or falling to pieces like a miserable coward? At least this is what I patch together as his experience in madness for, although he reported much to me, he gave me no thorough account of it. And since I view his madness as being tightly linked to his larger situation in California, I also view it as being a very complicated affair. So complicated in fact that it not only had its own internal logic, a reasoning of its own, but a sort of

unconscious reason, purpose, or utility that took it right back to the sane and social. To some extent my brother was in a situation that simultaneously called for a confrontation and a wholesale retreat. A confrontation in the sense that, being morally stricken even before his madness, he was a person in need of recovering or rediscovering himself. A retreat in the sense that his life in California had not only become poisoned but was poisoning the lives of others.

A logic of breakdown and a logic of recovery then at one and the same time. A logic of being built up even in the midst of being torn down. A logic of being delivered even in the midst of entrapment. It is only with this double and entwining logic that I can make sense of – as far as it makes sense to do so – his mad course.

For the fact of the matter is that, despite intensifying hallucinations that ranged, as he finally wheeled out onto the freeway, from seeing sharpshooters posted at every exit ramp and overhead pass to immense fires on mountaintops, he remained sufficiently in control of himself to make it all the way out to Palm Springs. To the very place that, of all places, he could expect a hostile reception and possibly even a confrontation of the most perilous sort.

It is this difficult thing (that is, where rationalizing about madness is concerned) of seeing a personal triumph in how close he brought himself to danger and a door of escape in how he managed to avoid it. Running towards such a danger rather than away from it, exceeding his limits in at least this respect, my brother was a man who, as I see it now, needed to prove to himself that he wasn't a coward. Given such factors as that he had a natural tendency to exaggerate, that Sutton, a man who possessed guns and knew how to use them, didn't require a lively imagination to be considered dangerous, and that, as I suspect, my brother had even gone so far as to identify him with the devil, it was surely no small thing for him to rush headlong in the night towards the centre of hell.

Yes, and yet there is still a factor that complicates matters or that could be considered an objection to so much reasoning about madness as if madness were pregnant with reason itself. According to my brother's testimony, he didn't drive out to Palm Springs *willingly*. The gangsters posted at every exit ramp and the car that was acting as if it had a mind of its own were, as parts of a larger supernatural will, responsible. And yet as much as he admitted this and didn't want to take credit for his final course and destination, I'm still forced to believe that a part of him was fashioning

rather than simply yielding to his fate. Not only for the reason that it wasn't until he had reached the outskirts of Palm Springs that he went out of control in the most definitive sense and his madness took its worst turn (at least from an objective or clinical standpoint), but for the reason that, when he spoke to me later about his time spent on the freeway – a time that, whatever its duration, couldn't have been less than two hours – he gave few indications that he had struggled against or lamented over being forced towards the monster's lair.

What lies before me now is to bring forth an account of my brother in the desert that compensates for and corresponds to a certain dead zone in his own account. On the one hand, this dead zone could be described as his inability to remember what happened to him there. On the other hand, it could be taken as his attaching no great significance to it. Certainly what I have been led to imagine as some sort of religious experience coming to him at the tail end of his trip has no express word of his to corroborate it. If I were to go strictly by what he told me, I would have to think that he never found God until he was in the hospital. But then the whole business of why he didn't drive straight into Palm Springs but rather stopped his car on the outskirts, why he abandoned it and started walking around in the desert, why he threw away his rings and some other personal effects – all this would be shorn of meaning. To say that madness was responsible for it is simply to say madness is madness or he did it because he did it. But for one such as myself who neither believes that the rational is heaven nor the irrational hell but that the two put together can form either one or the other, my brother's slipping into an even deeper state of psychosis followed both the internal and external logic of his madness. Or rather the two of them coming together when, as the sun rose over a desert landscape, as demonic impulses were driven out by divine ones, the reason for coming to Palm Springs as unconscious act of putting himself to the proof was completely transformed into the act of escaping reason as the devil's very own instrument. And, at the same time, when a seen and felt danger was completely transformed into an unseen and unfelt one, when the Lord Jim-like immersion of himself into the destructive element was replaced by a beatific (but equally dangerous) releasing of himself from all earthly cares. So did my brother go out in the desert as I imagine it and so did he weep and pray and fall on his knees and know a gratefulness and joy such as he had never experienced before. On and on he walked, oblivious to all but the huge orange ball that rose ever higher in the sky, chasing away all gloom and shade while it established its glorious rule.

By the time my brother was picked up by the police, he was dehydrated and

totally incoherent. The sun – the very same sun that caused him to have hallucinations on the beach only the day before – had turned not so surprisingly into a punishing god or else a confusion between god and devil. Its resplendent light had turned into torturous and life-threatening heat, its gracious presence an unbearable burden, its life-giving power an engendering of scorpions, snakes, and other desert creatures. Did it occur to him then that something was missing, that the war for the possession of his soul was still going on, that he had deceived himself by thinking he could pray to an unidentifiable god or perhaps an all too identifiable one that didn't correspond to the god of the theologian's so recently given testimony.

When my sister arrived at the police station, she found him sitting on the floor of his cell with his eyes tightly shut and, oblivious to her presence, rocking back and forth and repeating her address in a sort of ritual chant: "1792 Pinehearst Plaza. 1792 Pinehearst Plaza." When she tried to solicit some sign of recognition from him, he merely pointed to his watch and said: "You see that? That will tell you who I am."

When I heard this account from my sister, I was shocked in more ways than one. For, as it happened, the watch had originally been mine (a gift from her and Ed) and, although I had given it to my brother, it still bore my initials.

Judged from the standard of what it is to be a functioning human being, he had reached the nadir of his psychosis. So shaken up was his self-identity even before the onset of madness that, with his fixed notion of a war going on for the possession of his soul, it must have been taken in by this struggle. Indeed his mind or sanity must have been taken in by it and if it weren't for some powerful factors offsetting this, in danger of being lost for good. If his mind at this time had been, as I suspect it was, the theatre of a close struggle between the divine and the demonic and, furthermore, if his soul, as the prize of this conflict, had become identified with his mind and, even further, if the faith that good would eventually triumph over evil had not departed him, then his mental state couldn't have been other than, on the one hand, a nightmare of confusion and, on the other, a not so unwelcome sojourn in purgatory.

By the time he came out of the psychiatric hospital three days later, he had fully woken up to his surroundings. Presumably he also came out a Christian and stayed one for a short time. He had some strange and even critical things to say about the hospital that, on the one hand, made it out to be demonic (he mentioned vague incidents of either himself or other patients being tortured, raped, and possessed by the devil) and, on the other hand,

the site of his salvation (he claimed to have undergone an exorcism in this damned and dismal place).

I find myself now confronted with only one other matter in this whole affair that seems relevant to my subject: the status of Christ for my brother as the way, the truth, and the life. After his one call from the hospital when he announced that Jesus Christ was his Saviour, he made little reference to his faith. Indeed there is every reason to think that it rapidly dissipated as he got back on his feet, as he returned to his affairs, and as his belief in the devil itself dissipated. For the latter was still alive in him after he returned to Winnipeg and during the brief time he needed to convalesce. Indeed, it seemed to me then that the vividness of his demonic hallucinations was what preoccupied him the most and formed the basis of whatever religiosity he had. A change of environment and associations was presumably enough to bring back his former ways of thinking that excluded the supernatural (be it divine or demonic). It could be said then that, although my brother had seemingly more reason than most people to end up a true believer, he jettisoned his faith like a used and disposable item. And yet it is possible that he retained something not quite so blatant or specific as born-again Christianity. Something that goes beyond articulation, namely, his experience in the desert that, if I'm right in my guess, was a religious experience of the first order.

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1 These notes include some roughly sketched-out scenes such as the "Telephone to Palm Springs" one. I mention this to distinguish them from mere jottings that would still be far from the first draft stage. At the same time I can't help thinking that, being as inelegant and amateurish as they are, it might be overly generous to characterise them as an unfinished play. On the other hand, it might be that I'm going too far in criticizing my playwrighting efforts. Perhaps I'm being too harsh or finicky in the hope of putting distance between them and what I'm presently doing. This in turn leads me to think that there is something indefinite here that, without shunting aside all such considerations, can only result in propositions that are tentative. On the other hand, what I have just argued and drawn to a tentative conclusion could always be turned into a dialogue that, more disputatious, would seem to do away with the tentative. It would be largely the *tonality* of the discourse that would change. With certainty implicitly held to be the goal and uppermost possibility, the conflictual and tentative in such a dialogue, evidenced in stock phrases such as "in my opinion" and "I don't agree that such and such is the case" and in rhetorical questions only *suggesting* what is the case, are treated as being insignificant.

2 And if I risk bringing this up too much, it is to avoid underplaying it. For just as I have a fear of the first, so I have a fear of the second. With respect to the first, it is the wish simply to avoid growing tiresome with the theme of redeeming myself as a writer. With respect to the second, it is the call not just to go further with it but further *into* it. I suppose it is the difference between doing it as a performative thing already exhibiting the signs of self-congratulation and redeeming even this impetuosity with cautiousness and worry.