

How I have moved! I have traveled nearly three thousand miles in less than two weeks.

Now there is stillness—such a stillness as I have never heard before in all my life. Soon I shall start moving again, and perhaps I will never stop.

I am lying in a high alpine meadow, more than eight thousand feet above sea level. Yesterday I wandered near our lodge with three botanical ladies from Calgary, lean and tough as Amazons they were, and learned from them the names of many flowers.

The meadow is dominated by mountain avens, in seed now, like huge dandelion heads, alight and floating as they catch the morning sun. Indian paintbrush, from a faint cream to an intense vermillion. Chalice-cup, globe flowers, valerians, and saxifrages; contorted lousewort and stinking fleabane (two of the loveliest, despite their names), Arctic raspberries and strawberries, which rarely fruit; the three-leaved strawberries catch and hold at their center a flashing drop of dew. Heart-shaped arnicas, calypso orchids, cinquefoils, and columbines. Glacial lilies and alpine speedwell. Some of the rocks are covered by brilliant lichens, blazing in the distance like great masses of precious stones; others are clustered with succulent stonecrops, which burst lasciviously under the pressing finger.

We are far above the territory of lofty trees. There are many shrubs—willow and juniper, bilberry and buffalo berry—but above the timberline only the larches, with their chaste white trunks and downy foliage.

There are gophers, picas, squirrels, and chipmunks, sometimes a marmot in the shadow of a rock. Magpies, warblers, wrens, and thrushes. Bears galore, black and brown, though grizzlies are rare. Elk and moose in the lower pastures. I have seen an enormous shadow wing across the sun, and known at once it was a Rockies eagle.

Higher and higher—all life dying away, everything becoming a uniform gray, till mosses and lichens are the lords of creation once more.

Yesterday I joined the Professor, his family, and friend, “Old Marshall,” whom he called “brother,” and they looked like brothers, but were only friends and colleagues. I rode with them into a vast mountain plateau so high that we could look down upon the massed cumulus about us.

“Man has made no changes here!” cried the Professor, “he has only enlarged the goat trails.” I have no words for that feeling, nor had I ever had it before, which comes from the knowledge that one is far away from all humanity, alone in a thousand square miles. We rode in silence, for speech would have been absurd. It seemed the very summit of the world. Later we descended, our horses treading delicately among the undergrowth, to the glacial string of lakes with their strange names—Lake Sphinx, Lake Scarab, and Lake Egypt. Ignoring their cautious warnings, I stripped off my sweaty clothes and dived into the clear waters of Egypt, and floated on my back. To one side rose the Pharaoh Mountains, their old faces marked with gigantic hieroglyphics; but the other peaks were all unnamed—they may well remain so.

Coming back we passed a great glacial basin full of smooth moraine.

“Think!” cried the Professor. “This prodigious bowl was filled with ice to a depth of three hundred feet. And when we and our children are dead, seeds will have sprouted in the silt, and a young forest will nod over these stones. Here before you is one scene of a geological drama, past and future implicit in the present you perceive, and all within the span of a single human generation, and a human memory.”

I glanced at the Professor as he stood there, a tiny figure against the seven-hundred-foot wall of rock and ice; absurd in his battered hat and trousers, yet full of dignity and command. One saw the might of the glaciers and the torrents, and they were as nothing to the might of this proud insect who surveyed and understood them.

The Professor was a wonderful companion. On a strictly practical level, he taught me to recognize glacial cirques and the different species of moraine; to decipher the trails of moose and bear, and the ravages of porcupines; to survey the terrain closely for marshy or treacherous ground; to fix landmarks in my mind, so that I could never get lost; to mark the sinister lens-shaped clouds which portend freak storms. But his range was enormous, perhaps complete. He spoke of law and sociology, of economics; of politics and business, advertising; of medicine, psychology, and mathematics.

I had never known a man so profoundly in touch with every aspect of his environment—physical, social, human; yet he was enriched by a mocking insight of his own mind and motives which balanced, and rendered personal, everything he said.

I had met the Professor the evening before, and confided to him the story of my flight from family and country, and my hesitations about continuing medicine.

“My chosen profession!” I exclaimed bitterly. “Others chose it for me. Now I want only to wander and write. I think I shall be a logger for a year.”

“Forget it!” said the Professor, shortly. “You’d be wasting your time. Go and see medical schools, universities, in the States. The States is for you. Nobody’ll push you around. If you’re good, you go up. If you’re phony, they soon catch on.

“Travel now by all means—if you have the time. But travel the right way, the way I travel. I am always reading and thinking of the history and geography of a place. I see its people in terms of these, placed in the social framework of time and space. Take the prairies, for example; you’re wasting your time visiting these unless you know the saga of the homesteaders, the influence of law and religion at different times, the economic problems, the difficulties of communication, and the effects of successive mineral finds.

“Forget about lumber camps. Go to California. See the redwoods. See the missions. See Yosemite. See Palomar—it’s a supreme experience for an intelligent man. I once talked to Hubble and found he knew a prodigious amount of law. Did you know that he was a lawyer before he turned to the stars? And go to San Francisco! It’s one of the twelve most interesting cities in the world. California has immense contrasts—the utmost wealth and the most hideous squalor. But there’s beauty and interest everywhere.

“I have crossed America every way more than a hundred times. I have seen everything. I’ll tell you where to go if you tell me what you want. Well, what have you got to say?”

“I have run out of money!”

“I shall lend you whatever you need, and you can repay me when you like.”

The Professor had known me then a single hour.

The Professor and Marshall love the Rockies, and come to them every summer, as they have done for twenty years. On our return from Lake Egypt, they took me off the trail and deep into the forest until we came to a low dark cabin, half buried in the ground. The Professor delivered a brief illuminating lecture:

“This is Bill Peyto’s cabin. Only three people in the world besides us know where it is; it is officially listed as having been destroyed by fire. Peyto was a nomad and a misanthrope, a great hunter and observer of wildlife, and the father of uncountable bastards. He has a lake and a mountain named after him. Some slow malady attacked him in 1926, and finally he could live by himself no longer. He rode down into Banff, a wild and legendary stranger whom everyone knew of but nobody had seen. He died there soon after.”

I advanced towards the darkened and rotting hut. Its door was askew, and upon it I deciphered a faint scrawl: BACK IN AN HOUR. Inside I saw his cooking utensils and ancient preserves, his mineral specimens (he operated a small talc mine), fragments of his journal, and the *Illustrated London News* from 1890 to 1926. A temporal cross-section of a man’s life, cut clean by circumstance. I thought of the *Marie Celeste*. It is evening now, and I have spent the whole day lying in this broad meadow, chewing a blade of grass, and looking at the mountains and the sky. I have reflected, and I have nearly filled my notebook.

On a summer evening, at home, the setting sun is lighting up the hollyhocks and the cricket stumps stuck in the back lawn. Today is a Friday, and this means my mother will light the Sabbath candles, murmuring as she cups the flames a silent prayer whose words I never knew. My father will don a little cap and, lifting the wine, will praise God for his fecundity.

A little wind has sprung up, breaking at last the long stillness of the day, giving a restless quiver to the grass and flowers. It is time to get up and move, away from here, and onto the road again. Did I not promise myself that soon I would be in California?

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Having traveled by plane and train, I decided to complete my westward journey by hitchhiking—and almost immediately got conscripted for firefighting. I wrote to my parents,

British Columbia has had no rain for more than thirty days, and there are forest fires raging everywhere (you have probably read about them). A sort of martial law exists, and the forest commission can conscript anyone they feel is suitable. I was quite glad of the experience,

and spent a day in the forests with other bewildered conscripts, dragging hoses to and fro, and trying to be useful. However it was only for one fire they wanted me, and when at last we shared a beer over its smoking dwindling ruin, I felt a real glow of confraternal pride that it had been vanquished.

British Columbia at this time of the year seems bewitched. The sky is low and purple, even at midday, from the smoke of innumerable fires, and the air has a terrible stultifying heat and stillness. People seem to move and crawl with the tedium of a slow motion film, and a sense of imminence is never absent. In all the churches prayers are said for rain, and god knows what strange rites are practiced in private to make it come. Every night lightning will strike somewhere, and more acres of valuable timber conflagrate like tinder. Or sometimes there is just an instantaneous apparently sourceless combustion arising like some multifocal cancer in a doomed area.

Not wanting to be re-conscripted for firefighting—I enjoyed a day of it, but that was enough—I took a Greyhound bus for the remaining six hundred miles to Vancouver.

From Vancouver, I took a boat to Vancouver Island and ensconced myself in a guesthouse in Qualicum Beach (I liked the name Qualicum because it brought to mind Thudichum, the nineteenth-century biochemist, and *Colchicum*, the autumn crocus). Here I allowed myself a few days' rest from traveling and composed an eight-thousand-word letter to my parents, ending with the here and now:

The Pacific Ocean is warm (about 75°) and enervating after the glacial lakes. I went fishing today with an ophthalmologist here, fellow called North, once at Marys and the National, now in practice in Victoria. He calls Vancouver Island a "little bit of heaven which got left somehow," and I think he's right in a way. It has forests and mountains and streams and lakes and the ocean. . . . By the way, I caught six salmon, one just lets the line trail, and they bite, bite; sweet silvery beauties, which I shall have for breakfast tomorrow.

"I will descend to California in two or three days," I added, "probably by Greyhound bus, as I gather they are particularly hard on hitchhikers, and sometimes shoot them on sight."

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I arrived in San Francisco on a Saturday evening, and that night I was taken to dinner by friends I had met in London. The next morning they picked me up, and we drove over the Golden Gate Bridge, up the piney flanks of Mount Tamalpais to the cathedral-like calm of Muir Woods. I became silent with awe beneath the redwoods, and it was at that moment that I decided I wanted to stay in San Francisco, with its wonderful environs, for the rest of my life.

There were innumerable things to do: I had to get a green card; I had to find a place to work, a hospital which would employ me, informally and without pay, during the months it would take to get my green card; I wanted all my things from England—clothes, books, papers, and (not least) my faithful Norton motorbike; I needed all sorts of documents; and I needed money.

I could be lyrical and poetic when I wrote to my parents, but now I had to be practical and pragmatic. I had ended my giant letter from Qualicum Beach by thanking my parents:

IF I STAY in Canada, I will have a reasonably generous salary and time off. I should be able to save, and even to return something of the money which you have lavished on my life for twenty-seven years. As for the other intangible and incalculable things you have given me, I can only repay these by leading a fairly happy and useful life, keeping in touch with you, and seeing you when I can.

Now, only a week later, everything had changed. I was no longer in Canada, no longer thinking of life in the RCAF, no longer thinking of returning to England. I wrote to my parents again—fearfully, guiltily, but resolutely—telling them of my decision. I imagined their rage, their reproaches at my decision; had I not abruptly (and perhaps deceitfully) taken off and turned my back on them, on all my friends and family, on England itself?

They responded nobly, but they also expressed their sadness at our separation, in words which tear at me as I read them fifty years later—words which must have been wrenched out of my mother, for she rarely spoke of her feelings.

August 13, 1960

My dear Oliver,

Many thanks for your various letters and cards. I have read them all—with pride at your literary prowess, happiness that you are enjoying your holiday, but with a big element of grief and sadness at the thought of your prolonged absence. When you were born, people congratulated us on what they considered a wonderful family of four sons! Where are you all now? I feel lonely and bereft. Ghosts inhabit this house. When I go into the various rooms I feel overcome with a sense of loss.

My father, in a different mode, wrote, “We are quite reconciled to a comparatively empty house at Mapesbury.” But then he added a postscript:

When I say that we are reconciled to an empty house, this is of course, a half-truth. I need hardly say that we miss you very much at all times. We miss your cheery presence, your ravenous attacks on the “fridge” and larder, your piano playing, your disporting yourself naked in your room weightlifting—your unexpected descents at midnight with your Norton. These and a host of other memories of your vital personality will always remain with us. When we contemplate this large empty house, we feel a wrench at our heart and a deep sense of loss. We realize nevertheless that you have to make your way in the world, and with you must rest the ultimate decision!

My father had written about “an empty house,” and my mother wrote, “Where are you all now? . . . Ghosts inhabit this house.”

But there was still a very real, substantial presence in the house, and this was my brother Michael. Michael had, in some sense, been the “odd” son from his earliest years. There

always seemed something different about him; he found it difficult to make contact, he had no friends, he seemed very much to live in a world of his own.

Our elder brother Marcus's favorite world, from an early age, was one of languages; he spoke half a dozen by the age of sixteen. David's was one of music; he could have been a professional musician. Mine was one of science. But what sort of world Michael lived in, none of us knew. And yet he was very intelligent; he read continually, had a prodigious memory, and seemed to turn to books, rather than "reality," to get his knowledge of the world. My mother's eldest sister, Auntie Annie, who headed a school in Jerusalem for forty years, thought Michael so extraordinary that she left her entire library to him, even though her last sight of him had been in 1939, when he was only eleven years old.

Michael and I were evacuated together, at the start of the war, and spent eighteen months at Braefield, a hideous boarding school in the Midlands run by a sadistic headmaster whose chief pleasure in life seemed to be beating the bottoms of the little boys under his control. (It was then that Michael learned *Nicholas Nickleby* and *David Copperfield* by heart, though he never explicitly compared our school to Dotheboys or our headmaster to Dickens's monstrous Mr. Creakle.)

In 1941, Michael, now thirteen, went on to another boarding school, Clifton College, where he was unmercifully bullied. In *Uncle Tungsten*, I wrote about how Michael's first psychosis developed:

My Auntie Len, who was staying with us, spied Michael as he came, half naked, from the bath. "Look at his back!" she said to my parents, "it's full of bruises and weals! If this is happening to his body," she continued, "what is happening to his mind?" My parents seemed surprised, said they had noticed nothing amiss, that they thought Michael was enjoying school, had no problems and was "fine."

Soon after this, when he was fifteen, Michael became psychotic. He felt a magical and malignant world was closing about him. He came to believe that he was "the darling of a flagello-maniac God," as he put it, subject to the special attentions of "a sadistic Providence." Messianic fantasies or delusions appeared at the same time—if he was being tortured or chastised, this was because he was (or might be) the Messiah, the one for whom we had waited so long. Torn between bliss and torment, fantasy and reality, feeling he was going mad (or perhaps so already), Michael could no longer sleep or rest, but agitatedly strode to and fro in the house, stamping his feet, glaring, hallucinating, shouting.

I became terrified of him, for him, of the nightmare which was becoming reality for him. What would happen to Michael, and would something similar happen to me, too? It was at this time that I set up my own lab in the house, and closed the doors, closed my ears, against Michael's madness. It was not that I was indifferent to Michael; I felt a passionate sympathy for him, I half-knew what he was going through, but I had to keep a distance also, create my own world of science so that I would not be swept into the chaos, the madness, the seduction, of his.

The effect of this on my parents was devastating; they felt alarm, pity, horror, and above all bewilderment. They had a word for it—"schizophrenia"—but why should it have singled out Michael and at such an early age? Was it the terrible bullying at Clifton? Was it something in his genes? He had never seemed a normal child; he was awkward, anxious, perhaps "schizoid" even before his psychosis. Or—the most painful for my parents to consider—was it the result of the way they had treated or mistreated him? Whatever it was—nature or nurture, bad chemistry or bad bringing up—medicine could surely come to his aid. At sixteen, Michael was admitted to a psychiatric hospital and given twelve "treatments" of insulin shock therapy; this entailed bringing his blood sugar down so low that he lost consciousness and then restoring it with a glucose drip. This was the first line of treatment for schizophrenia in 1944, to be followed, if need be, by electroconvulsive treatment or lobotomy. The discovery of tranquilizers was still eight years in the future.

Whether as a result of the insulin comas or a natural process of resolution, Michael returned from the hospital three months later, no longer psychotic but deeply shaken, feeling he might never hope to lead a normal life. He had read Eugen Bleuler's *Dementia Praecox; or, The Group of Schizophrenias* while in hospital.

Marcus and David had enjoyed a day school in Hampstead, a few minutes' walk from our house, and Michael was glad now to continue his education there. If he was changed by his psychosis, this was not immediately apparent; my parents chose to think of it as a "medical" problem, something from which one could make a complete recovery. Michael, however, saw his psychosis in quite different terms; he felt it had opened his eyes to things that he had never previously thought about, in particular the downtroddenness and exploitation of the world's workers. He started reading a communist newspaper, *The Daily Worker*, and going to a communist bookshop in Red Lion Square. He devoured Marx and Engels and saw them as the prophets, if not the messiahs, of a new world era.

By the time Michael was seventeen, Marcus and David had finished medical school. Michael did not want to become a doctor, and he had had enough of school. He wanted to *work*—were workers not the salt of the earth? One of my father's patients had a large accounting business in London and said he would be happy to have Michael as an accounting apprentice or in any other capacity he wanted. Michael was quite clear about the role he would like to have; he wanted to be a messenger, to deliver letters or packages that were too important and urgent to be left to the post. In this, he was absolutely meticulous; he would insist on putting whatever message or packet he was entrusted with directly into the hands of its designated recipient and no one else. He loved walking around London and spending his lunch hours on a park bench, if the weather was nice, reading *The Daily Worker*. He once told me that the seemingly humdrum messages he delivered might have hidden, secret meanings, apparent only to the designated recipient; this was why they could not be entrusted to anyone else. Though he might *appear* to be an ordinary messenger with ordinary messages, Michael said, this was by no means the case. He never said this to

anyone else—he knew it would sound bizarre, if not mad—and he had begun to think of our parents, his older brothers, and the entire medical profession as determined to devalue or “medicalize” everything he thought and did, especially if it had any hint of mysticism, for they would see it as an intimation of psychosis. But I was still his little brother, just twelve years old, not yet a medicalizer, and able to listen sensitively and sympathetically to anything he said, even if I could not fully understand it.

Every so often—it happened many times in the 1940s and early 1950s, while I was still at school—he became floridly psychotic and delusional. Sometimes there was warning of this: he would not *say*, “I need help,” but he would indicate it by an extravagant act, such as flinging a cushion or an ashtray to the floor in his psychiatrist’s office (he had been seeing one since his initial psychosis). This meant, and was understood to mean, “I’m getting out of control—take me into hospital.”

At other times, he gave no warning but would get into a violently agitated, shouting, stamping, hallucinated state—on one occasion, he hurled my mother’s beautiful old grandfather clock against a wall—and at such times my parents and I would be terrified of him. Terrified, and deeply embarrassed—how could we invite friends, relatives, colleagues, *anyone*, to the house with Michael raving and rampaging upstairs? And what would their patients think? Both my parents had their medical offices in the house. Marcus and David also felt reluctant about inviting their friends into (what sometimes seemed to be) a madhouse. A sense of shame, of stigma, of secrecy, entered our lives, compounding the actuality of Michael’s condition.

I found it a great relief when I took weekends or holidays away from London—holidays which, besides everything else, were holidays from Michael, from his sometimes intolerable presence. And yet there were other times when his native sweetness of character, his affectionateness, his sense of humor, shone out again. At such times, one realized, even when he was raving, that the real Michael, sane and gentle, was there underneath his schizophrenia.

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When, in 1951, my mother learned of my homosexuality and said, “I wish you had never been born,” she was speaking, though I am not sure I realized this at the time, out of anguish as much as accusation—the anguish of a mother who, feeling she had lost one son to schizophrenia, now feared she was losing another son to homosexuality, a “condition” which was regarded then as shameful and stigmatizing and with a deep power to mark and spoil a life. I was her favorite son, her “mugwump” and “pet lamb,” when I was a child, and now I was “one of *those*”—a cruel burden on top of Michael’s schizophrenia.

The situation changed for Michael and for millions of other schizophrenics, for better and worse, around 1953, when the first tranquilizer—a drug called Largactil in England, Thorazine in the United States—became available. The tranquilizers could damp down and perhaps prevent the hallucinations and delusions, the “positive symptoms” of schizophrenia,

but this could come at great cost to the individual. I first saw this, shockingly, in 1956 when I came back to London after my months in Israel and Holland and saw that Michael was bent over and walked with a shuffling gait.

“He’s grossly parkinsonian!” I said to my parents.

“Yes,” they said, “but he’s much calmer on the Largactil. He’s gone a year without a psychosis.” I had to wonder, however, how Michael felt. He was distressed at the parkinsonian symptoms—he had been a great walker, a strider, before—but even more upset by the mental effects of the drug.

He was able to continue at his job, but he had lost the mystical feeling that gave depth and meaning to his messengering; he had lost the sharpness and clarity with which he had previously perceived the world; everything seemed “muffled” now. “It is like being softly killed,” he concluded.

When Michael’s dose of Largactil was reduced, his parkinsonian symptoms subsided, and, more important, he felt more alive and regained some of his mystical sensibilities—only to explode, a few weeks later, into florid psychosis again.

In 1957, by now a medical student myself, interested in brain and mind, I phoned Michael’s psychiatrist and asked if we could meet. Dr. N. was a decent, sensitive man who had known Michael since his initial psychosis nearly fourteen years earlier, and he too was disturbed by the new, drug-related problems he was encountering with many of his patients on Largactil. He was trying to titrate the drug, to find a dosage which would be just enough but not too much or too little. He was, he confessed, not entirely hopeful here.

I wondered whether systems in the brain concerned with the perception (or projection) of meaning, significance, and intentionality, systems underlying a sense of wonder and mysteriousness, systems for appreciation of the beauty of art and science, had lost their balance in schizophrenia, producing a mental world overcharged with intense emotion and distortions of reality. These systems had lost their middle ground, it seemed, so that any attempt to titrate them, damp them down, could tip the person from a pathologically heightened state to one of great dullness, a sort of mental death.

Michael’s lack of social skills and of ordinary day-to-day aptitudes (he could scarcely make a cup of tea for himself) demanded a social and “existential” approach. Tranquilizers have little or no effect on the “negative” symptoms of schizophrenia—withdrawal, flattening of affect, etc.—which, in their insidious, chronic way, can be more debilitating, more undermining of life, than any positive symptoms. It is a question of not just medication but the whole business of living a meaningful and enjoyable life—with support systems, community, self-respect, and being respected by others—which has to be addressed. Michael’s problems were not purely “medical.”

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I could, I should, have been more loving, more supportive, while I was back in London, in medical school; I could have gone out with Michael to restaurants, films, theaters, concerts

(which he never did by himself); I could have gone with him on visits to the seaside or the countryside. But I didn't, and the shame of this—the feeling that I was a bad brother, not available to him when he was in such need—is still hot within me sixty years later.

I don't know how Michael would have responded had I shown more initiative. He had his own severely controlled and limited life and disliked any departure from it.

His life, now that he was on tranquilizers, was less turbulent but, it seemed to me, increasingly impoverished and constricted. He no longer read *The Daily*

Worker, no longer visited the bookshop in Red Lion Square. He had once had a certain feeling of belonging to a collective, sharing a Marxist perspective with others, but now, as his ardor cooled, he felt increasingly solitary, alone. My father hoped that our synagogue might provide moral and pastoral support, a sense of community, for Michael. He had been quite religious as a youth—after his bar mitzvah, he wore tzitzit and laid tefillin daily and went to shul whenever he could—but here too his ardor had cooled. He lost interest in the synagogue, and the synagogue, with its diminishing community—more and more of London's Jews were emigrating or assimilating and intermarrying in the general population—lost interest in him.

Michael's general reading, once so intense and omnivorous—had not Auntie Annie left her entire library to him?—dwindled dramatically; he ceased to read books almost completely and looked at newspapers only desultorily.

I think that despite, or perhaps because of, the tranquilizers, he had been sinking into a state of hopelessness and apathy. In 1960, when R. D. Laing published his brilliant book *The Divided Self*, Michael had a brief resurgence of hope. Here was a physician, a psychiatrist, seeing schizophrenia not as a disease so much as a whole, even privileged mode of being. Although Michael himself sometimes called the rest of us, the non-schizophrenic world, "rottenly normal" (great rage was embodied in this incisive phrase), he soon tired of Laing's "romanticism," as he called it, and came to regard him as a slightly dangerous fool.

When I left England on my twenty-seventh birthday, it was, among many other reasons, partly to get away from my tragic, hopeless, mismanaged brother. But perhaps, in another sense, it would become an attempt to explore schizophrenia and allied brain-mind disorders in my own patients and in my own way.