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Mouths of Sun and Flint:

Development, Creativity, and Soul

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Prologue: An Opening¹

By a river in ancient India, a blue-skinned boy gambols in the moonlight, palms scooping the luminous mud. His playmates, perhaps jealous of his beauty, report to his mother that he has been naughty. Not only out past his bedtime, but eating mud too! Mother, bent from years over the rice pot, tending damp, malarial brows, marches straight down to the river. Open up, she scolds the boy. Let me see what tale your teeth tell. Smiling, unperturbed, the boy shakes his head. But his mother won't let go. Finally he grins, popping his red mouth wide. What does she see? The whole universe! Yes, caught up in his mouth are star drifts, hurricanes, fleas. The mother and children and the riverbank are there. The mud and the moonlight too.

The entire universe is there. And all in the mouth of a mudlark.

I. Many Worlds

*"We are here with a body laid out which fades away,
with a pure shape which had nightingales
and we see it being filled with depthless holes..."*

*"Here I want to see those men of hard voice.
Those that break horses and dominate rivers;
those men of sonorous skeleton who sing
with a mouth full of sun and flint."*

- Federico Garcia Lorca

¹ Adapted from the Hindu myth "Krishna Shows Yashoda the Universe." See, for example: Campbell, Joseph, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton, NJ: Bollingen Foundation Inc./Princeton University Press, 1973): 327-328.

Unlike the pleasantly terse beats of “birth, “life,” and “death,” *development* is a clumsy word. It has slopes and angles and ends in a finite *T*, despite nearly boundless connotations. But its very ugliness captures the often uncomfortable, mostly confusing process of expansion at the heart of human endeavor. In its four awkward syllables, the hills and valleys of life’s strange evolution carom off the tongue. It is a term that encapsulates both personal striving and social progress. Nigel Dower poses the ethics of development thus: “How ought one to live as an individual?” and “How ought a society to exist and move into the future?”² I offer a third question: *Why?* Why do we develop? And why must we engage in development, both personal and social, as consciously and actively as we can? Given the significance of these questions, it would appear that the ethics of development is not only central to our own lives, it provides both aspiration and blueprint for our collective wellbeing.

Throughout my twenty-odd years, my mother has embodied a tangible answer to the questions of development, her life a model for my own. Sprouting from solid farm stock in rural North Dakota, she confounded her family, and, to some extent, her mid-century context. As a teen in the early 1960s, she once asked my German-Russian grandmother, “What would you think if I married a black man?”³ Then, fresh out of college, she embarked on a world tour that took her from Bismarck to Bangkok, from Florence to Delhi to Tehran. But she wasn’t just a tourist. Her humane spirit allowed her to engage with people – and to wrestle with herself and her vocation. In a similar way, the following essay will present development along two spectra: from self to social, and from means to ends. These axes intersect, however, and it is at this point of intersection – the origin or “zero” of the Cartesian plane – that a new concept of soul, and creativity, will emerge. With my mother’s story as north star, I will attempt to navigate the

² Gasper, Des, *The Ethics of Development* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 23.

³ To her credit, my grandmother was open to the idea.

ethical maelstrom of development, charting the slim but vital strait between ourselves and other beings.

But first, what do I mean by development? The word offers other contrasts to birth and death beyond mere syllable count. Whereas these termini set up a Manichaeian contrast of sorts – life as tension or duality lived out between womb and tomb – development offers life as daedal, a complex and creative work. In the introduction to his English translation of Martin Buber’s *I and Thou*, Walter Kaufmann writes, “Philosophers tend to reduce the manifold to the twofold. Some of the greatest taught that there were two worlds. Why has hardly anyone proclaimed many worlds?”⁴ Development, when stripped of its darker colonial shades, could offer a word for the many worlds between birth and death, past and future, self and other. It has the added advantage of having no obvious opposite. Progress is paired with regress, evolution with devolution, growth with decline. But what’s the opposite of development?

Development, in fact, is the partner of envelopment. It begins with the negative prefix *-de*, meaning “undo.” When paired with the Latin *veloper*, or “wrap up,” development becomes “an unfolding.”⁵ I find it interesting that a word signifying progress begins with a negative prefix. In Lorca’s poem, “Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias,” death, not development, is sung. But its pulse is so vibrant, so living, that it stands as a testament to our central paradox – that with each breath lived, we also die. While the *motion* of development is upward and expansive, its *moment* often rests in tension and destruction. Much of social development is the story of “those men of hard voice/Those that break horses and dominate rivers.” If Lorca’s poem ended here, at domination, it would be a snapshot of history, but no promise. Instead, he manages both.

⁴ Buber, Martin, *I and Thou* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1996), 17.

⁵ Barnhart, Robert K, (ed.), *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, (New York: Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd, 2000), 273.

These same men, ruthless and bold, are shown in the next line to be skeletons, their hard voices raised in song. The “depthless holes,” which fill the dead, are mirrored and expanded in the image of mouths “full of sun and flint.” Here it is absence as much as substance that is sung. Indeed, the poem’s final fourth is titled, “Absent Soul.” The clash of sun and flint strikes at the heart of human development, a process both luminous and earthen. It is man the tool-maker and man the soul-seeker. It is woman too – the soul that is absent, or rather hidden, from much of recorded history.

This history is long and fraught. Development’s first era stretches from cave dwellings to the rise of European nation-states in the sixteenth century, while its second era spans the height of Europe to the discovery and subsequent rise of North America. The present, “global” era has roots in pre-World War II dynamics⁶ and is just now beginning to challenge the single strand that has run throughout: development as the quest for material gain. Prehistoric ages were named for the discovery and mastery of natural wealth: stone, bronze, iron. In medieval markets, a nascent cosmopolitanism arose and foreign goods assumed an incantatory air: chocolate, pomegranate, tea. The Silk Road was the first extensive information highway, its traders conversing in the first common tongue – that of supply and demand. During the Enlightenment, the term “conchylomania” was coined to describe those rabid shell collectors whose passion for carapaces was spurred by greed as much as by science.⁷ Today we call it “consumerism.” Indeed, while consumerism is often decried as the downfall of modern man, its origins are ancient and far more banal. “Development by acquisition” is its less-storied name, and it runs the gamut from desperation to desire.

⁶ Gasper 2004, 33.

⁷ Coniff, Richard, “Mad About Seashells,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 2009.

But development, as I mentioned earlier, is a word for many worlds. Economic growth is one world, but its hegemony – along with its Euro-centricity – is on the decline. The work of Nobel Prize-winning economist and philosopher Amartya Sen has done much to turn the tide. Under the banner “development as freedom,” Sen’s capability approach to *human* development (a new modifier, one that signals a return to the personal) presents a richer iteration, one replete with opportunities and obligations for social justice. However, Sen is still an economist and as such tends to pare the human condition down to certain tangible needs.⁸ In an attempt to expand this view of humanity, philosopher Martha Nussbaum has delineated a list of ten fundamental capabilities, which includes “senses, imagination, and thought,” as well as “emotions” and “practical reason” as requisites of development.⁹

Our language, the words we use, is a signifier of deeper semantic processes, ones that touch upon the tectonics of values and beliefs. The shift from material concerns to human and even planetary ones is signaled in current literature. Today, one may encounter words like empathy, compassion, and wonder paired with international development. Iris Marion Young subtitled her incisive article on the dynamics of gift, “On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought.” A particular passage deserves attention: “The ethical relation is...asymmetrical in the sense that *opening on the other person* is always a gift” (emphasis added).¹⁰ Development, both personal and social, signifies an unfolding or unwrapping of said gift. But the process begins, I argue, not with the gift itself, but with the opening.

⁸ Gaspers 2004, 179.

⁹ Ibid, 184.

¹⁰ Young, Iris Marion, “Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought,” in *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 216-217. Young’s concept of “asymmetrical reciprocity” is a necessary one in international development. As she explains, “Communication is a creative enterprise that presupposes an irreplaceability of each person’s perspective, so that each learns something new, beyond herself or himself, from interaction with the others” (217). In other words, by recognizing and respecting our differences, we can engage with and learn from them, rather than flattening them out (through so-called symmetrical relations).

II. Soul

“In this act of ‘shrinking or withdrawal’ (tsimtsum), God had thus created a place where he was not, an empty space that he could fill by the simultaneous process of self-revelation and creation...It is an idea that is not dissimilar to the primordial kenosis that Christians have imagined in the Trinity, whereby God emptied himself into his Son in an act of self-expression.”

– Karen Armstrong¹¹

“...the hole in the roof of the new church went unrepaired, letting in both sunshine and rain.”

– Hermann Hesse¹²

By raising the specter of soul, I lay myself open to claims of “bringing God into it.” However, in an attempt to bridge the closed world of self and the many worlds of development, an alien concept is needed. In stark terms, development demands an opening in the self *that is not self*. And that, simply, is my contention for soul. It is an opening, a synapse, if you will, that mediates between self and universe. Soul breaks the self-referential loop of “I” and allows such “gifts” as empathy, imagination, and wonder to be exchanged. The ethical questions posed by development – how we ought to live and why – are moot if development occurs in a closed system. In physics, closed systems are subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that energy devolves into entropy (increasing disorder and decline) if not renewed by an outside source. But development, while arguably disordered, is also increasingly complex. What accounts for higher-order intricacy and even the reversal, at times, of stagnation and decline? Referring to entropy, James Gleick observes, “The important laws, *the creative laws*, lie elsewhere” (emphasis added).¹³

In the many tomes written on development, soul is seldom encountered. Religion and spirituality occasionally rise – to be swiftly submerged. Given God’s track record (or at least that

¹¹ Armstrong, Karen, *A History of God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993), 267.

¹² Hesse, Hermann, *Pictor’s Metamorphoses and Other Fantasies* (New York, NY: Picador, 1982), 69.

¹³ Gleick, James, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1987), 308.

of his human representatives), it would seem that such skepticism is warranted. Recently though, doubt is aimed less at traditional theology than at its frayed edges, a no-man's-land of New Age magic and extremist mayhem. Hippies and self-help have mangled mysticism, while on the opposite end, jihad has metastasized from an internal struggle to a worldwide scream.¹⁴ What use have we now for the embattled soul? Hasn't it gone the way of transcendental meditation and patchouli oil? Isn't it a relic of less enlightened times when man was reliant on some "divine spark" for existential insurance? The metaphor may be outmoded, but to discard soul, I fear, is to discard life's secret sustenance – the space that translates developing into development.

The preferred counterpart of soul is the ubiquitous "self." While this concept has been much-debated, philosophers and psychologists generally agree that our consciousness is not so much a thing as an activity – a parcel of dynamic interactions. Some claim that the self is *only* activity, though I prefer the approach taken by my mother's graduate school mentor. A bright, meteor of a man, Daniel Jordan had degrees in music, human development, social anthropology and psychology. He defined self as the interface between character and potential in action. This description has merits beyond its functionalist forbearer for it speaks to an element of self beyond pure process, that is, character or cohesion. As polymath Jacob Bronowski asserts, "A self must have some consistency..."¹⁵ But what does this mean?

In the early twentieth century, Kurt Gödel, a Viennese logician (and close friend of Einstein), developed his Incompleteness Theorem, which consists of two parts. First, in mathematical terms, it proves that all complex systems contain contradictions (statements both true and false) that challenge their internal consistency. The English language is one such

¹⁴ In Islam, there is a distinction between greater and lesser jihad. Greater jihad is the internal "struggle of the soul" to find faith and a path of righteous living. Lesser jihad is an external struggle and extends to religious warfare, though it also includes more nuanced actions taken on behalf faith.

¹⁵ Bronowski, Jacob, *The Identity of Man* (American Museum Science Books Edition, 1971), 16.

system. It contains both the sentences “Apples are red” and “Apples are blue.” From within the bounds of English itself, there is no way to tell which statement is actually true. Instead, we must go outside language to observation and experience to determine the truth. This leads to the second part of Gödel’s Theorem, which explains that no system can prove itself from within itself. Think of a courtroom: A man is accused of murder. He declares himself innocent. But his statement can only be proved by people other than himself, by witnesses who either confirm or refute his alibi. This means that consistency – the burden of proof – hinges on some gap in the system, an *incompleteness* that allows new insights from new worlds. Going back to the concept of self, it too can be defined as a “complex system” – and hence incomplete. Few would argue otherwise. We all apologize for our imperfections, agonize over our faults. But what if incompleteness is just the negative idiom for a much more positive – indeed vital – trait? Incompleteness, after all, is just another word for openness.

At the same time, there is much talk of human beings as “ends.” The moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant includes the maxim: Treat people as ends in themselves, not as means to another end. But, as Walter Kaufmann notes, “Kant told men always to treat humanity, in our person as well as that of others, as an end *also* and never *only* as a means...” (emphasis added).¹⁶ In other words, we are *both* process (means) and purpose (ends). Purpose, or meaning, ensures our consistency – and our morality. It provides an orientation to which we can direct our actions. However, as I have just pointed out, to be consistent, man must also be incomplete. Does this mean that we can never reach our goals or realize our potential? Is purpose some poltergeist that makes a great noise only to dissolve into the ether? If we conceive of purpose as completion or “self-actualization” than yes, I’m afraid it is a ghost. However, the paradox is resolved if we reverse perspectives and view purpose, not as some apex or ceiling to be reached, but rather as

¹⁶ Buber 1996, 16.

an oculus to be enlarged. In this sense, humans may be defined, not as means and ends, but rather as means and openings. *The hole in the church ceiling must remain unrepaired.*

That the soul can be absence as much as substance is contrary to convention, contrary, even, to common sense. Metaphor, after all, demands imagery. Just as it was easier to define the self in physical terms (Descartes' pineal gland, for instance; or materialists' "chemical stew"), the soul-as-divine spark metaphor has triumphed through the ages for its poetic allure. Flame in a lantern, ember in a stove, star in the heavens, twinkle in the eye – how Nature conspires to direct us toward her material bounty! And rightly so. For mystics and philosophers have the disconcerting habit of removing ideas from their physical homes, thus causing the kind of world estrangement that Arendt abhorred.¹⁷ But the opposite tack, a fixation on matter and appearance, ignores absence as development's first cause. To discount the soul and its openness is to remain trapped in the psyche's self-referential loop. The phrase "open-minded" is championed as one of the aims of development. Sadly, the first half of this phrase is often ignored in favor of its latter half, the more substantive mind. Ethical development, human and social, must remedy this imbalance by the recognition that "enlarged thought" requires, first and foremost, a space.

III. Development as Daedal

"The labyrinth from which Theseus escaped by means of the clew of Ariadne was built by Daedalus, a most skillful artificer. It was an edifice with numberless winding passages and turnings opening into one another, and seeming to have neither beginning nor end, like the river Maeander, which returns on itself, and flows now onward, now backward, in its course to the sea."

– *Bulfinch's Mythology*¹⁸

¹⁷ Arendt, Hannah, *The Life of the Mind* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971).

¹⁸ Fuller, Edmund (ed.), *Bulfinch's Mythology* (New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1959), 129.

I see in you the estuary that enlarges and spreads itself grandly as it pours in the great Sea.

– *Walt Whitman*

Space and soul, while ends (or openings) in themselves, are also means. They are channels – estuaries – for creativity and the creative capacities of empathy, imagination, and wonder. In other words, soul is both the *why* of development – purpose, directionality, meaning – and its *how* – artistry, regeneration. By linking the means and ends of development through the portal of soul, the artist is reconciled with his creation. By recognizing both the utility *and* the integrity of absence, the artist also acknowledges the unfinished nature of his work. Its beauty and incompleteness he respects. After all, Daedalus’s masterpiece, the labyrinth, is both an archetype of incompleteness and a symbol of infinity. “Seeming to have neither beginning nor end,” the labyrinth initially “returns on itself,” a self-referring loop. But at the mouth of the labyrinth, like the mouth of the river, all its terrible tanglings are released. Development, too, is labyrinthine, both infinite and incomplete.

Daedalus, the artist-scientist who saved Theseus with a simple gift of twine and who constructed mechanical wings on which to escape his Cretan captors, is barely recalled from the depths of legend. His story, though, demands revival if only for its internal complexity, which mirrors our own. Endlessly inventive and not a little strong-willed, Daedalus was his own archetype: the artist as self-made man.¹⁹ His artistry became his pride, however, and led to the near-murder of his nephew, Perdix, a rival in technical skill. But perhaps it is wise to take the Greeks’ treatment of Daedalus with a smidge of salt. Arendt, tracing our modern understanding of culture to its Greco-Roman roots, describes the situation thus:

¹⁹ Campbell, Joseph, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton, NJ: Bollingen Foundation Inc./Princeton University Press, 1973): 23-25.

“To Greek understanding, there was no contradiction between...the love of the beautiful, and contempt for those who actually produced the beautiful...The chief reason of the distrust of fabrication in all forms is that it is utilitarian by its very nature. Fabrication...always involves means and ends...Fabricators cannot help regarding all things as means to their ends or, as the case may be, judging all things by their specific utility.”²⁰

Daedalus is condemned as amoral (or immoral) because everything becomes a means for him. The products of his craftsmanship, however, be they mazes or flying-machines, are revered for their beauty. Wary of instrumentalism, the Greeks would have scoffed at modern economists’ talk of “creative destruction” (the idea that to bake a cake a few eggs must be cracked). Yet art does require sacrifice, some struggle and surrender. So too development. Where creativity is concerned, can the means be as ethical as the ends?

Considered retrospectively, the means of development have often been a lesson in good intentions gone awry. From the promise of the Marshall Plan, which devoted necessary funds to the reconstruction of Western Europe after World War II (in an attempt, primarily, to repel communism), the legacy of foreign aid has drawn increasing ire. William Easterly’s account of this legacy – aptly-titled *The White Man’s Burden* – contrasts the failures of development’s “Planners” with the successes of its “Searchers” (his terms). The Planners are people with good intentions and lots of money. They operate under stirring slogans like “End Poverty,” “Stop Hunger,” and “Universal Literacy.” Searchers, meanwhile, prefer “piecemeal, gradual improvements” to sweeping plans.²¹ While Easterly dichotomizes the two types rather simplistically – I believe development calls for both goals and grassroots – he does have a point.

²⁰ Arendt, Hannah, “The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance,” in *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 16.

²¹ Easterly, William, *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2007), 30.

Searchers are those people who have re-balanced the “open-minded” equation. They have reframed development as oculus not apex. They seek openness, not terminus.

Like Daedalus, development’s Planners have often abandoned moral considerations in favor of artistic ideals. Economists, for example, create models using the *ceteris paribus* clause – holding rogue variables constant which in the real world tend to fluctuate. Western politicians prefer democracy in its familiar form, not the hybrids that may result from diverse contexts and cultures. In these cases, paradigm has trumped people – artistry is divorced from soul. But the reverse, people over paradigm, may be equally damning. For instance, if the paradigm of ethics did not exist, what would prevent development from inflicting incalculable harm? The artist, like the economist and politician, must balance these competing aims. Where either the personal or the impersonal reign, injustice (and instrumentalism) may result. On the one hand, if I care only about my immediate friends and family, why should I worry about some hungry children half a world away? On the other, if society cedes control to, say, “the invisible hand of the market,” accountability and thus moral responsibility are lost. Both scenarios represent the dark side of development as daedal. They reveal what happens when there is no give-and-take between artist, artwork, and audience. Ethical development, like creativity, requires reciprocal flow.

The daedalean model is not lost, however. It simply demands renewed emphasis on relationships. The most timely and timeless works of art establish a rapport between subject and object, observer and observed. Michelangelo’s David is a cold chunk of marble, but it is also a relational form. I can relate to the sculpture – and the artist’s spirit – through the stone. David’s gaze becomes museful, not marmoreal. His pose is calm, not “contrapposto.” Development, re-

fashioned, should also be relational. A major flaw in current models is their omission²² of the centrality of relationships – including those between theory and practice, science and religion, tradition and modernity. Development, in its social and international forms, will become a mere pretense for imperialism if relationships are not restored.

IV. White Man's Burden or Poor Man's Gift?

"It is the idea of carrying unlimited space within the physical actions of the body that gives the Aborigine his particular identity."

– James Cowan²³

"For U.S. Senator Henry Dawes, the solution to the Indian problem was to 'teach him to stand alone first, then to walk, then to dig, then to plant, then to hoe, then to gather, and then to Keep' – the last step being a vital one."

– David Wallace Adams²⁴

One of the most troubling aspects of international development arises from its almost unavoidable ethnocentrism. In its social sense, development is just the latest in a long line of progressivist movements – the Age of Exploration, colonialism, imperialism, the Enlightenment, Manifest Destiny, democratization – with origins (or at least ascendancy) in Europe, and later North America. Today's development organizations, whether multi-national bodies or smaller non-profits, must contend with this legacy of Western domination and ignorance. While the continued evolution of development shows some signs of hope, without the restitution of relationships and soul, the West will remain estranged from global reality.

²² Even models that do concede the importance of relationships often do so as a form of tokenism. In reality, disparate communities remain very much isolated from each other despite the proliferation of information and communication technologies.

²³ Cowan, James, *Mysteries of the Dream-Time: The Spiritual Life of Australian Aborigines* (Dorset, UK: Prism Press, 1989), 90.

²⁴ Adams, David Wallace, "Fundamental Considerations: The Deep Meaning of Native American Schooling, 1880-1900," *Harvard Educational Review* 58, 1 (1988): 6.

In the mid-1970s, my mother spent four years with the Aborigines in Western Australia. She was a white teacher at a time when racism was rampant. Many teachers still viewed their task as a “civilizing” one. A few lone voices decried this destructive ethos, my mother among them. But she was torn. By championing the cause of the dispossessed, a Westerner may be accused of assuaging her conscience or, worse, of “going native.” At the same time, there are real and devastating problems that demand resources and attention. And who else has a preponderance of both than we of the West? My mother walked a delicate line. She danced the Brolga²⁵ with the women and ate the gifts of turtle meat left by the men after hunting. She helped revive traditional basket-weaving and talked with the elders, but she also maintained respectful boundaries. “Going native,” as it is unfortunately termed, is merely another, more naïve form of ethnocentrism. It views the “other” – typically an indigenous group – as the truer, purer, better man. Man before he was corrupted. Man before the Fall. Paternalism is pernicious in all its forms, and this form no less. The challenge becomes how to embark upon the necessary tasks of development – a disinterested engagement with the “other” – without homogenizing or glorifying them in the process.

A road less traveled, but well worth traveling, lies at the juncture of development, creativity, and soul. As society transforms itself from “between nations” to constellation, development must be reframed. No longer a leaden load of the privileged, development entails reciprocity – and the recognition that the poor too have gifts to give. A sense of absence, of openness, is needed to revive us from our long material dream. How else can we establish credibility with those millions living in the penumbra of poverty, barely scraping by? How else can the planet – atmosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere – regain its balance if we continue to gorge

²⁵ A brolga, also known as the “Australian Crane,” performs an elaborate mating dance. The Aborigines of Melville Island have a traditional dance based on the crane’s movements.

ourselves on its limited wealth? The how and why of development demand a different expansion than our current path describes. Through the space in ourselves that is not self, each person is renewed by the world – and renews it in turn. In this way, we are each a new language, a new meaning, completing the system and complicating it, reaching, through our soul, to another.

Epilogue: Another Opening

Development is a word for the many worlds between birth and death, but it contains birth and death too. As I sit by my mother's chair in the infusion room, asking the nurse to slow down the chemo drip, I wonder if I am somehow fooling myself. All this talk of opening, and here we are facing death – a closing if ever I saw one. But something does not quite square. I have watched over this past year as the hope of one treatment fades and we try yet another. I have watched as Mom grows stronger now, now weaker, but manages throughout all to maintain this clarity that cuts my own burdens down to size. I ask her about the soul. She tells me about the Aborigines, an old friend, the woman she met in the infusion room last Tuesday. I ask her about herself. She tells me about my childhood. She seems incapable of talking about herself somehow. But I keep asking. You see, I have begun to notice little glimmers between her teeth. Comets. Flinty suns. And sometimes, when she yawns, the Pleiades.

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