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In the Heart of America, 1650

Johannes H. von Gumpfenberg

Joannis Van Loon

Janet von Gumpfenberg

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Dense foliage

This small book joins together the creations of two men working three hundred years apart.

The tale from the autobiography of Joannis Van Loon, doctor of Rembrandt Van Rijn, tells of his adventures when he traveled to visit Nieuw Amsterdam in the recently settled continent of America in 1650.

The drawings and paintings come from the work of independent artist Johannes von Gumpenberg, taken mostly from the time when he lived near the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, during the last quarter of the 1900s.

Two "Johanneses," far apart in time, developed themes that share much in common and hopefully will provide enjoyment for the reader.

**In the Heart
of
America, 1650**

J.G. 1982

In the Heart of America, 1650

By Joannis Van Loon, 1670

and

Hendrik Van Loon, 1930

Art from Johannes von Gumpfenberg's Body of Work,

1970 forward,

chosen by Janet von Gumpfenberg

Edited by Janet von Gumpfenberg, 2012

The following few chapters are excerpted and copied verbatim from the amazing book R.V.R. – The Life and Times of Rembrandt Van Rijn, written by his physician and friend, Joannis Van Loon, soon after Rembrandt's death in 1669.

The project began as a desire to share this interesting story with family and friends, hoping to lead them to read and enjoy the entire book. For one thing, the publication from 1930 has languished in popularity and scholarly attention. Secondly, the 1939 version for Heritage Press, revised by the publishing author with added Rembrandt illustrations selected by J.B. Neumann, greatly abridges experiences not relating to Rembrandt and, in fact, omits the chapters printed here regarding the diary writer's American sojourn. I would like to see more attention in our time for the original 1930 book as a valuable resource that vividly depicts history, in both Europe and America.

Working closely with this section, I was surprised to see that some of my husband's artwork, envisioning an imaginary and abstracted world, echoed many themes from the real past. So I decided to join the text and art into a unit, including the cover.

I have tried to investigate the authenticity of this diary "provided with as few notes, emendations and critical observations as possible by his great-great-grandson, nine times removed, Hendrik Willem Van Loon."

There is actually little information indicating whether this is a most interesting manuscript from the 1600s or has been somewhat "fictionalized." Hendrik Willem Van Loon authored well-known books during his time as a professor of history at various colleges in the United States and was admired for imaginative and well-informed presentations. So, possibly the "emendations" are greater than he admitted. Certainly at least, his task as translator has resulted in some current choices of phrasing and vocabulary, if not alteration of content.

On the other hand, the personality of Rembrandt's friend the doctor differs strongly from that of his descendant, and the facts and adventures told throughout the long book, as well as the strongly expressed personal point of view, seem to go beyond a modern writer refashioning bits and pieces from historical sources. There exist at Cornell University several cataloged boxes of manuscripts belonging to the twentieth century professor, so perhaps some day there will be more clarity about authorship.

This tale concerns travels into unexplored early America revealing relations between Native Americans and the first arrivals. Those who read these adventurous passages will find that the author also discourses on life and death, war and peace, philosophy and human nature, in most interesting ways.

Aside from some alterations in punctuation, changes here to the 1930 text only concern spacing, using the markers and illustrations made by my husband. I also added the publication title and shorter chapter headings. After that, all the credit goes to the original author – whoever that may be.

I would like to add as a side note that it gives me pleasure to complete this effort in 2012, the year chosen for the canonization of the Lily of the Mohawks, Blessed Kateri Tekawitha, as the first Native American saint in the Roman Catholic Church.

*Janet von Gumppenberg
Conanicut Island, Rhode Island*

Setting Forth to Find the Lost Tribes

In the Heart of America, 1650

Chapter 34

BERNARDO AND I SET FORTH TO FIND THE LOST TRIBES AND
SOME TERRITORY FIT FOR AGRICULTURE, AND NEITHER OF US
IS VERY SUCCESSFUL



Of my many voyages through the interior of the New Netherlands that kept me in America so much longer than I had planned, I am not at liberty to speak at the present moment. Those adventures have all been set down with great care in the diary I kept which together with my final report I surrendered to My Lord Andries upon my return to Holland. And since servants are sometimes curious

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and I don't know into whose hands these recollections will fall after my death, I do not think that I ought to repeat them here.

Nor shall I waste much time upon the interesting subject which had been my special hobby since I concluded my studies in Montpellier. The eager results of my investigations I laid down in my little book on the "Art of Medicine among the American Indians." From that angle, the whole expedition was a mere waste of time and money. For the Indians, though possessing fair skill in the use of certain herbs, were just as ignorant about anesthetics as we ourselves are.

Quite frequently I heard of some wonderful medicine man who set broken bones or removed arrow heads without causing his patients any pain. But when at last I ran him down (often after a search which lasted two or three months) I invariably discovered that the reports of his performance had been greatly exaggerated and that either he used some sort of hypnotic influence (which worked well enough with these simple-minded natives) or that he followed the same methods we employ at home and filled the poor sufferer with such vast quantities of gin and rum that not infrequently they died of a stupor brought about by alcoholic poisoning, when they would have lived had they been kept perfectly sober.

No, from a purely practical point of view, this voyage was not a success. The only person who benefited from it was I myself. When finally I returned home, many of my friends used to pity me. "Eight years in a howling wilderness among painted savages. Good God! What a waste of time!" was a remark I not infrequently heard. But that was hardly true. I realize of course that I was not a second Marco Polo. I did not come home with a few million guilders' worth of diamonds and rubies, sewn in the seams of my clothes. Nor could I, even if I tried, astonish them with stories about golden-roofed palaces and imperial crowns made of one single piece of lapis lazuli. Outside of the few little brick houses in Nieuw Amsterdam, I never saw anything much more inspiring than a tent made out of cow-hide and made of very dirty cow-hide at that. Nor can I truthfully say that lapis lazuli crowns were the fashion those years I spent in the New World. A few of the savages used to stick eagle feathers in their hair but, as eagles were rare birds, even in those days, an ordinary barn-yard turkey was not infrequently pressed into service and a dejected-looking capon trying to hide his sadly

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damaged tail would often bear silent witness to the lack of discrimination with which young braves would often settle the problem of head-gear.

And during the whole of my seven or eight years (one lost all idea of time out there), I saw only one diamond and that belonged to the captain of a slave ship I once found at the mouth of the South River. It was a curious slave ship, or rather, it was a curious captain of a slave ship. The man was incredibly pious. Three times a day he would call together his crew and read to them from the Bible. Neither would he eat meat as long as he was at sea, for fear that such a diet would increase his carnal lusts and make him desire one of the poor black wenches that lay bound and gagged in the hold of the ship.

I tried to argue with him (for in those days I still believed that logic could move mountains or at least people) and prove to him that he could settle his problems overnight by choosing another trade, that no doubt it was a very fine thing on his part not to eat meat during the voyage for the aforementioned purpose, but suppose he give up his nefarious business? The world would be a great deal better for it, and he would like to be guaranteed a steak a day. But no, he could not do it. And why not? Because he had promised a woman in England the largest diamond in the world. Unless he brought her the largest diamond in the world, she would not marry him. And then he excused himself for it was six o'clock and he had to read a chapter from the Bible to his crew. I asked him which one he was reading to them that day and he answered, the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke.



Surely our Good Lord harbors strange customers on his little planet. I had always known this. And I had always more or less rebelled against this arrangement. What the New World did for me was this: it made me accept humanity as God had made it, not as I thought that he ought to have made it or as I would have made it if I had been given the chance. This new attitude of mind was not the result of a sudden conviction. It came to me after two months spent on

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the flat of my back in a little wooden cabin somewhere in the heart of those endless forests which are to be found all along the western border of our American possessions.



Theoretically of course our colonies in America reach clear across from the Atlantic to the Pacific. But no one, so far as I know, has ever walked from Nieuw Amsterdam to the Spanish settlements in California. Most maps depict the northern half of the American continent as one vast mass of solid land, but this is merely guesswork. With my own eyes I have seen a lake that looked for all the world like part of a sea. The Indians told me it was a lake and I had to take their word for it, but I would not be the least bit surprised if it were afterwards discovered that it was part of that branch of the Arctic Ocean which Hudson discovered on his last voyage and where he is said to have been murdered by his crew.

But of all the land that lies to the west of the mountains, we still know so little that everything I write down here is based upon speculation rather than upon knowledge. For one thing, I am no explorer. I never learned how to draw maps or how to handle a compass. Yes, I can see when the needle points toward the north and then say with a great deal of conviction, “We are now going due south or east or west.” But that is about as far as my knowledge of that useful instrument goes.



My method of traveling was exceedingly simple. My Lord Andries having provided me generously with funds and the treasury of the colony having been sufficiently reorganized by industrious old Stuyvesant to honor my drafts, I was always well provided with cash. By this time, most of the Indians had learned that

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the funny-looking little round disks with the armored man on horseback were not just mere ornaments to be worn as ear-rings by their squaws, but were valuable talismans in exchange for which the merchants of Nieuw Amsterdam would give them almost anything their hearts desired.

It was rather a nuisance to travel with a big wooden box filled with Holland guilders, and there was a certain risk about it. But this risk I overcame by occasionally practicing my art as a healer. Indian medical methods, contrary to the glorious reports of many of the early discoverers, were primitive in the extreme. The patients were dosed with enormous potions of hideous-looking and -tasting liquids, brewed in great secrecy by professional sorcerers who as a rule were as ignorant as their patients were superstitious. The mortality among the tribes (especially among the children) was appalling. Quite often therefore I was able to pose as a miracle man by performing insignificant little operations which those people regarded as the work of a god. I encouraged this reputation as much as possible for it meant not only safety but a degree of comfort which few travelers had experienced before me. And when I heard that somewhere in the West there lived a number of tribes vastly superior in civilization and political organization to the natives who dwelled along the seaboard, I decided to pay a visit to these regions and see what opportunities they offered to those future wheat growers whom my Lord Andries and his brother hoped to settle in the New World.



As there was a certain degree of danger connected with a trip of this sort, I tried to persuade Bernardo not to accompany me, but he stubbornly refused.

“After all,” he reasoned, “I too am not entirely a free agent. I was given money for this voyage that I might find the Lost Tribes of Israel. I believe just as little in those Lost Tribes as you do. Ecbatana is the place to look for them, not America, and the girls of Babylon know more about them and why they refused to go back home to Jerusalem, than those in Nieuw Amsterdam.

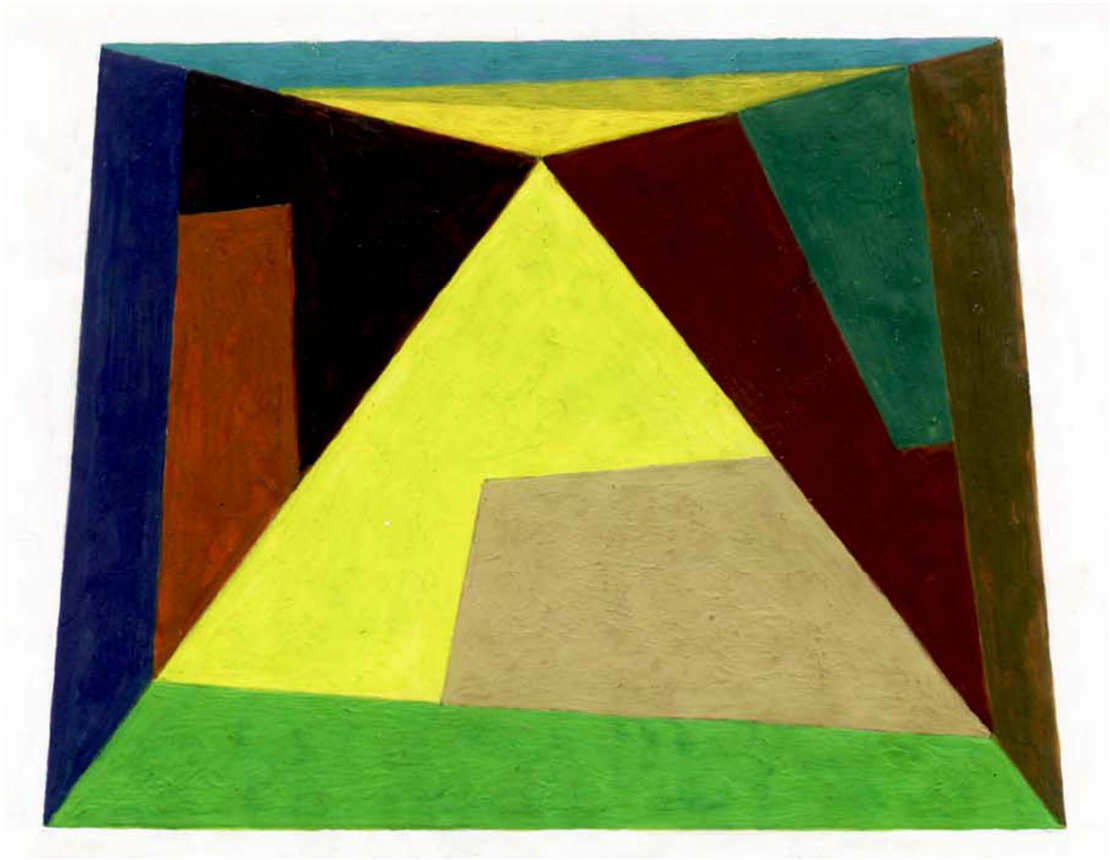
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“All the same, I am not here as a gentleman of leisure, amusing himself hunting rabbits and shooting squirrels. I am here as the emissary of a few pious Jews in Amsterdam who entrusted me with part of their hard-earned florins to perform a certain, well-defined task. The very name ‘The Five Tribes,’ attracts me and intrigues me. I would never forgive myself if I did not use this opportunity to visit those long-lost brethren. There are only five of them, according to that French friend of Doctor La Montagne. That means that the other five are lost. Perhaps I will find those later. But for the moment these five will have to answer to the purpose and I am going with you.”

During the last month, the excellent Bernardo had changed a great deal. He was actually beginning to talk. And sometimes he even smiled. He explained this to me one day when we had walked some distance along the right bank of the North River and stood on the edge of a very high cliff overlooking the valley. He threw both hands up toward the high heavens and shouted: “Space! Endless, unlimited space! Thank God, that I learned the meaning of the word space before I died.”

And when I said, “Yes, but you had space of this sort when we sat on the dikes of the Zuyder Zee,” he shook his head. “I know,” he answered, “but that was not quite the same. There I was like a bird, whom kind people allowed to play in the room. I could pretend that I was at liberty to amuse myself, but the cage was still on the table, waiting for me to return. Here it is different. Here, for the first time in my life, I feel that I am really free. There is no cage except such a cage as I wish to make for myself. I can wander a thousand miles toward the north and a thousand miles toward the south and a thousand miles toward the west and if I were not such a terribly poor sailor, I could sail thousands of miles toward the east and there would be nothing to keep me back.

Setting Forth to Find the Lost Tribes



The Influence of Green – Color Study, 1990's

“This suits some strange primitive instinct that lies buried in the heart of all of us Jews. We were a desert people. Our friends too often forget that. For thousands of years we never went near a city unless we had to. Hunger drove us to the high-walled towns of Egypt and Palestine. Then it was hunger for gold and for ease and for safety and comfort. The city corrupted us. We were not powerful enough to build ourselves another Babylon or Nineveh. We had to content ourselves with a mean little village of mean little tradesmen and narrow-minded priests, which our pride made us call the center of the universe. And there we grew into something that was absolutely contrary to our true inner nature.

“Our early prophets were men who dwelled in space – who worked in space – who thought in terms of space. Their successors looked out of their tiny, barred windows upon the dark court-yards of neighbors who were equally badly

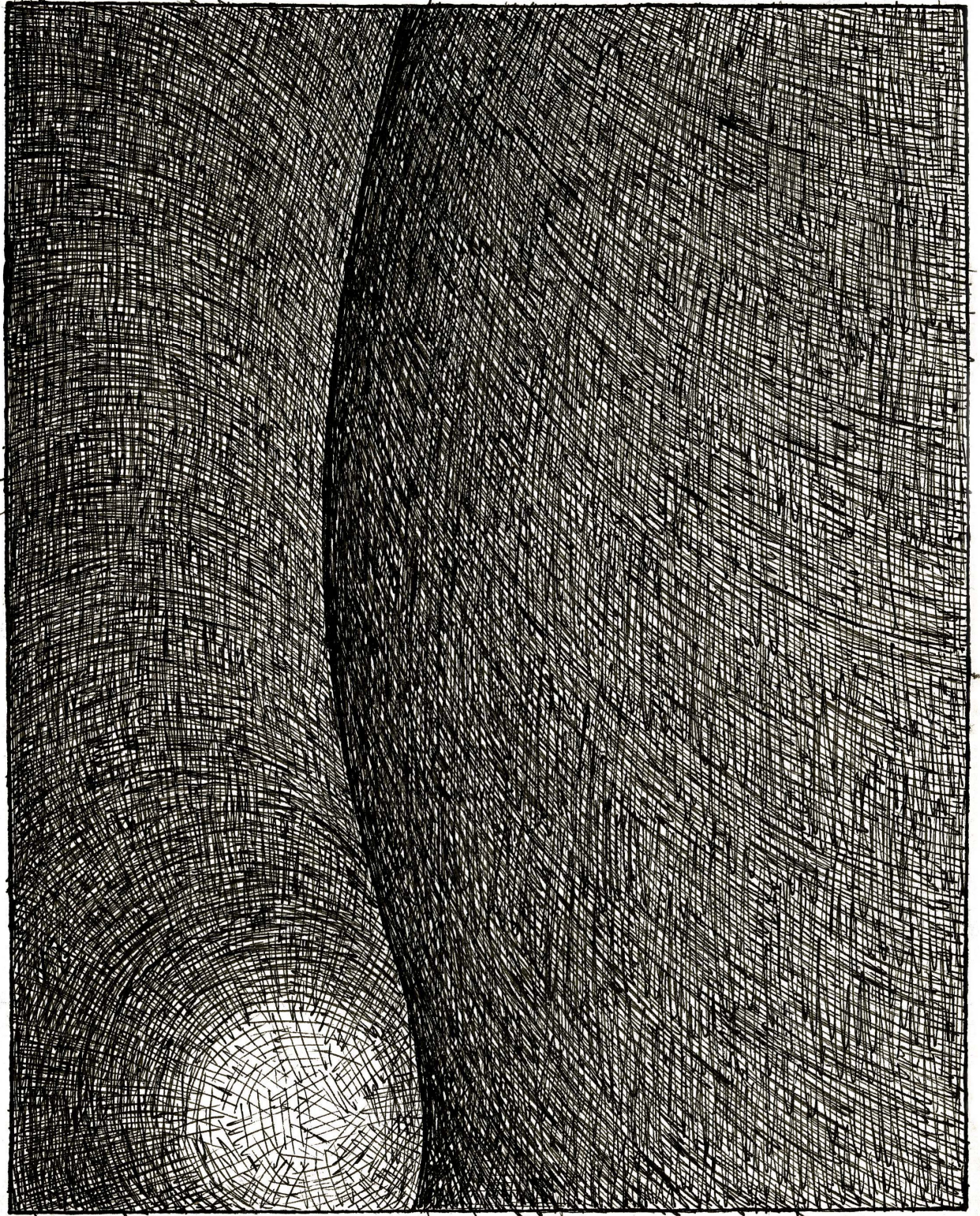
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off and after a few hundred years of that sort of life, they came to the conclusion that all the world was a prison and in order to make existence bearable they chained the human soul to that philosophy of despair that lies buried within the pages of so many of their holy books. The Talmud, the Torah – I learned them by heart as a child – every line of them a leaden weight fastened to my soul to keep me from soaring too far away from the dungeons into which my people had crept out of their own volition, once they lost the touch of that freedom that had made them the salt of the earth.

“You think I exaggerate. But Moses proclaimed his Holy Law from the top of a mountain, not from a cellar in Jerusalem. Joshua spent his days on the battlefield. David sang his psalms while herding his father’s sheep on the mountain-sides of Judea. Samuel took Saul from behind the plow to make him king of the Jews. Jesus was a country boy. He spent his childhood in a hamlet – a mere handful of houses on a hillside of Israel. He preached his sermons out in the open. Eleven of his disciples were fishermen and day-laborers. One came from the big city and his name was Judas

“I want to join the immortal eleven – sunshine and rain and dirt and mud, honest sunshine and honest rain and honest dirt – working for my daily bread in the sweat of my brow – not counting somebody else’s money or learning somebody else’s wisdom by heart in a stuffy room where there has not been a ray of light for the last fifteen or fifteen hundred years.”

And having delivered himself of this strange outburst, the longest single speech I had ever heard him make, the honest fellow went down to the Breestraat and bought himself a complete outfit, such as was worn by the professional beaver-hunters of the northern country, and was as happy as a child that has been given its first grown-up suit of clothes and is going to take its first trip on the Haarlem canal-boat with papa and mamma and half a dozen of his little friends.



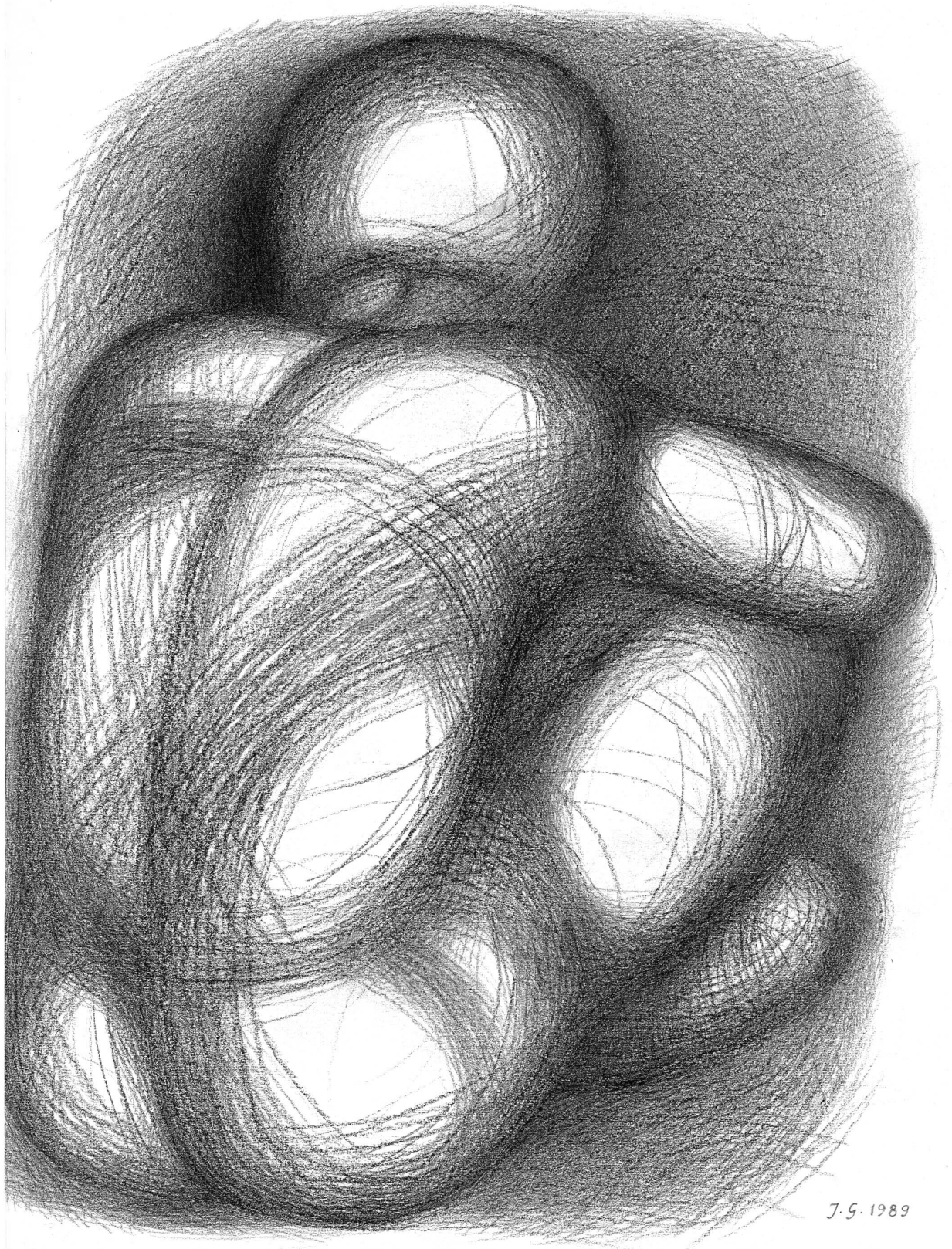
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We left Nieuw Amsterdam late in August, when the sun was still blazing hot – spent a week at Vriesendael and then struck for the west along a trail that was hardly discernible from an ordinary squirrel’s track.

The famous Five Tribes proved to be no myth, but a reality, and at first sight, a very formidable reality. Nor did they show any visible signs of joy at our approach. Instead they promptly surrounded our small party and conducted us politely but quite firmly to a small wooden stockade where they locked us up and left us to our own devices for three entire days and nights.

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Then someone who looked like a chief and spoke Mohawk came to ask us who we were – where we came from – what we meant to do in their country and, finally, how we happened to have Mohegan porters.

To this we answered through one of our Indians, who spoke a little Iroquois, that we were peaceful travelers, that one of us was a famous physician, that we came from a country far away across the big water, that we were merely visiting their country on account of the stories we had heard about the wisdom and learning of their medicine-men, and that the Mohegans had accompanied us to help us carry our luggage but would return to their own country as soon as we had had a chance to hire some of the local natives for that purpose.

He then asked who was the doctor. The interpreter pointed to me. The Mohawk looked at me, shook his head as if in some doubt, and went away again.

He returned that evening. Was I really a physician? Yes! Had I ever used a knife, as he had heard the white people could do? Yes! What was my specialty? Had I brought my instruments? Yes! Would I follow him? I would.



One of the Mohegans was permitted to carry my bag and the three of us started. We reached a village that was quite unlike any other Indian village I had ever seen. No one was visible, but from all the tents there came the noise of a low wailing. We went to the center of the village. Our guide withdrew. I took my interpreter with me and entered. The room was sparsely lit by a small fire. An old crone sat in front of it. The Mohegan translated. She was the mother of the head chief. Her son was ill. He was in great pain. He would soon die. Could I cure him? I

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answered that I would first have to see the patient before I could give her a definite answer. She said that she would take me to the place where he was hidden from fear that evil spirits might discover him and torture him still further. If I could cure him, I would be given freedom to roam throughout the territory of the Five Nations. If not, all of us would be killed.



This announcement did not tend to make me feel less nervous than I already was, but I followed the old squaw to a corner of the camp where I saw a small wooden house surrounded by a circle of smoldering fires. These fires had been lit to keep the evil spirits away. Inside the house lay a man of perhaps fifty years of age. His face was distorted with pain. His hands were clenched, his lips set tight. Six women, three on each side of him, were singing a low dirge.

I at once suspected an attack of the stone. I made a few inquiries and touched the abdomen. My first guess seemed right. I told the mother that I could cure her son – that he had fallen victim to a Devil who now lived in his entrails in the form of a large pebble – that I would capture this Devil and cut him out, provided they did as I bade them. The old squaw agreed. I kept the two wives who looked huskiest, and sent the other four away. I told the mother to get me a torch. She went out and shortly afterwards came back with a box of candles which had probably been stolen from some murdered Dutch trader. I sent the mother away and told the interpreter to hold the candle while I made the incision. Meanwhile the two wives were to take hold of the hands of the patient and under no circumstances allow him to arise. I made the incision. I never knew such fortitude. The man hardly winced. I took the stone out with my forceps (I don't believe in touching any wound with my hands, as my French colleagues do), and I bandaged the wound.

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These natives have an incredible power of recuperation and I knew that in two or three days the man would probably be able to walk. I called the old mother back into the tent and told her to send all the wives away and spend the night with her son, for fear the Devil might return. She asked me where that Devil was now and I said, "In my pocket. But he is still very lively. During the night, I shall tame him and in the morning I shall give him to you and you can drown him the lake or burn him in a fire."

Then I went back to the stockade and slept a few hours. In the morning there was such shouting and such beating of drums that I feared for the worst. Undoubtedly the old woman had called in one of the native medicine-men (they always do) and the chief had died. I did not even take the trouble to eat my breakfast, firmly convinced that we all would be executed before noon.



By and by the noise increased and a procession came heading our way. We were marched to the village but our baggage was kept behind, another sure sign to me that they meant to kill us.

Well, after an interminable walk, with at least a million wild savages excitedly dancing up and down beside us, we came to the village and there before his mother's tent stood my patient of last night, all dressed in his best leather coat and without a shred of my bandage of the previous evening. He was apparently feeling perfectly well and I now understood why the early explorers had given such glowing accounts of the medical achievement of the Indians. They committed, however, one small error of judgment due to faulty observation. The doctors of the wild men are atrocious, but their patients are perfect. For where else in the world would one find a man who less than twelve hours after being cut for stone is able to walk home unassisted?

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After this miraculous cure, our position of course became most agreeable. We were taken from the stockade and lodged in half a dozen tents in the heart of the village. Even the Mohegans, whom the Mohawks detest, were treated kindly. They were given an elaborate meal and were allowed to return to their country unmolested.

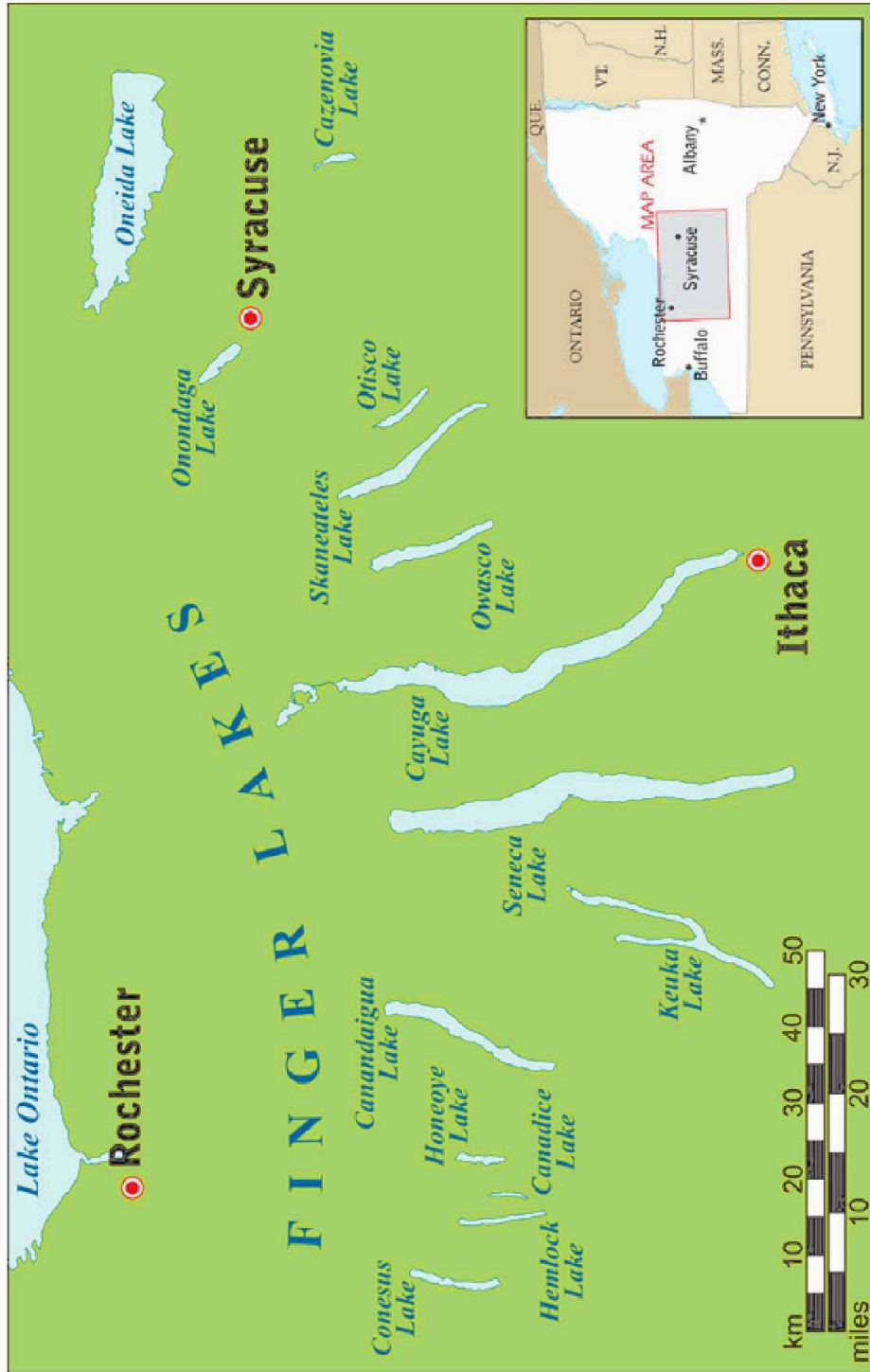
And the next day, after I had presented the chief with his erstwhile tenant, had then taken the stone back from him, had placed it on a heavy boulder and had smashed it with his battle-ax (fortunately it was a very brittle one and the trick worked to perfection), I was told that I could have as many guides and servants as I cared to, yea, that the whole tribe would follow me if necessary.

I chose a dozen of the strongest and with them explored the country of the Oneidas and Onondagas in the north and towards the east without finding anything that suited my purpose, and then late in the fall I decided that I would make a dash for the west.

Bernardo was to remain behind and watch over our luggage while I and two guides started for a big river that was the frontier between the land of the Senecas and the Susquehannocks. The Senecas belonged to the Five Nations, but the Susquehannocks did not, and I was warned to keep out of their territory. I also was told that it would be better if I waited until next spring, but we were in the middle of an unusually fine Indian summer and I counted on being back in three or four weeks.



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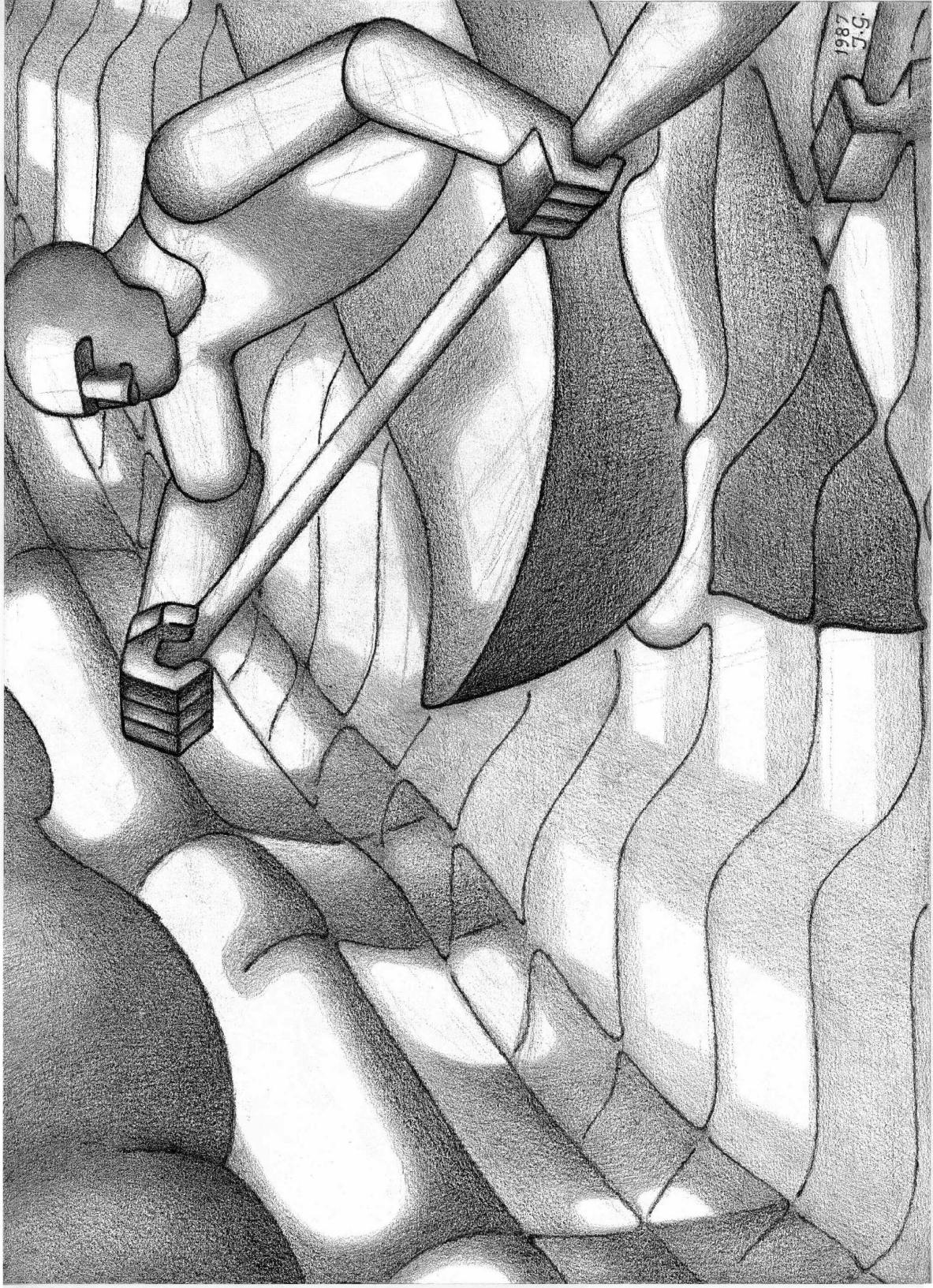


<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fingerlakesmap.png> (Originally uploaded to the English Wikipedia on April 2007 by Michael J. Permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the [GNU Free Documentation License](#) .)

(Note: the following names from this map are referenced as the story proceeds: [Oneida](#), [Onondaga](#), [Owasco](#), [Cayuga](#), [Seneca](#))

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We entered the hunting fields of the Cayugas and one night, about a week after we had left, we reached the top of a low hill from which one had a view of a large but melancholy-looking lake. On top of that hill the three of us spent the night. In the morning I decided to cross the lake if my guides could make me a canoe within a reasonable amount of time. They asked whether two days would be too long, and I said no, that that would do very nicely.

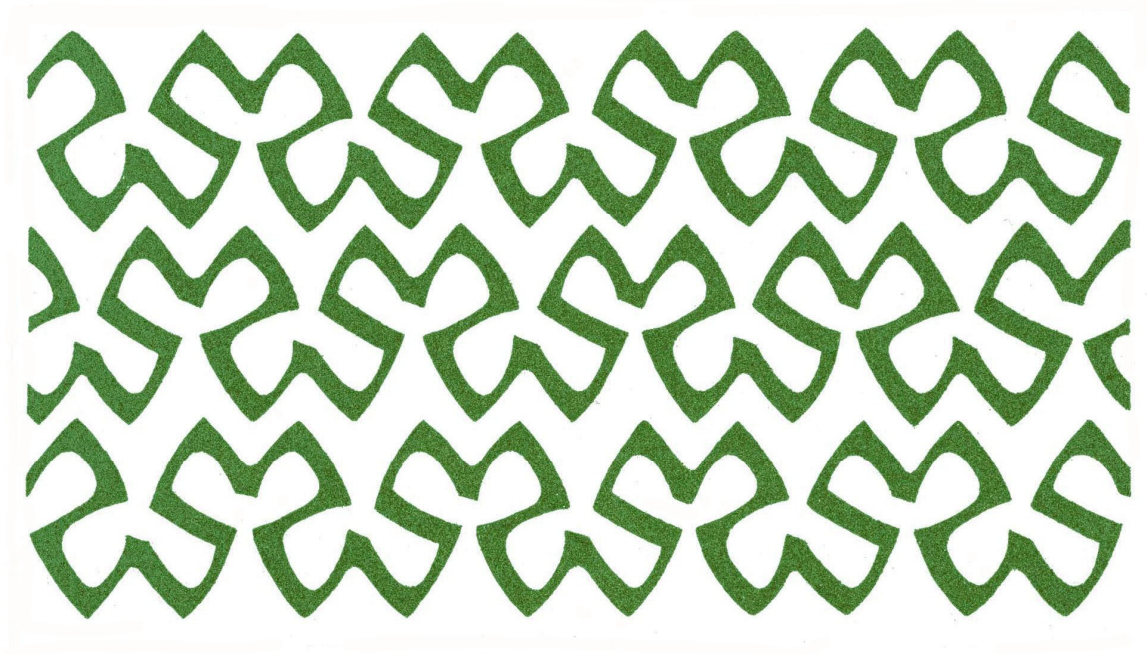


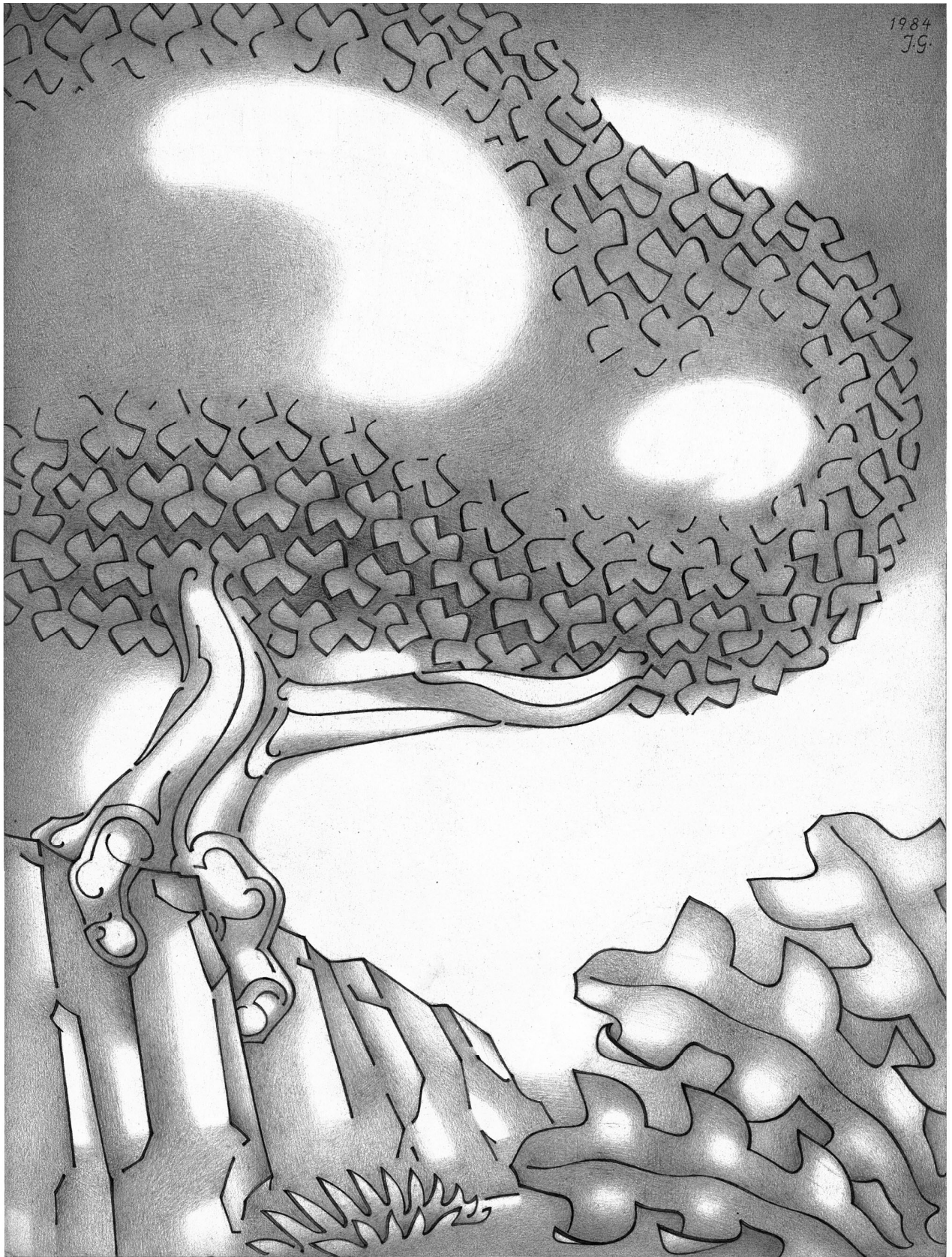
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They set to work and I decided to take a walk. A short distance from the shore there was a high cliff which interested me through its extraordinary shape. When I came nearer I noticed that it was part of the hillside where the soil had been washed away, and then I discovered a narrow gorge made by a river that had dug its way through the soft stone like a knife cutting through cheese. It was a geological formation entirely new to me, and the walk between the steep rugged walls fascinated me. After about ten minutes I came to a waterfall and had to return. But just before I came to where there was a curve in the riverbed, I stopped to give one more look at the scene behind me.

For a better view I climbed upon a large boulder, but no sooner was I on top than I heard a soft rustling sound and saw a tiny black snake hastily leaving a round pile of leaves which the wind had blown together into the hollow on top of the stone.

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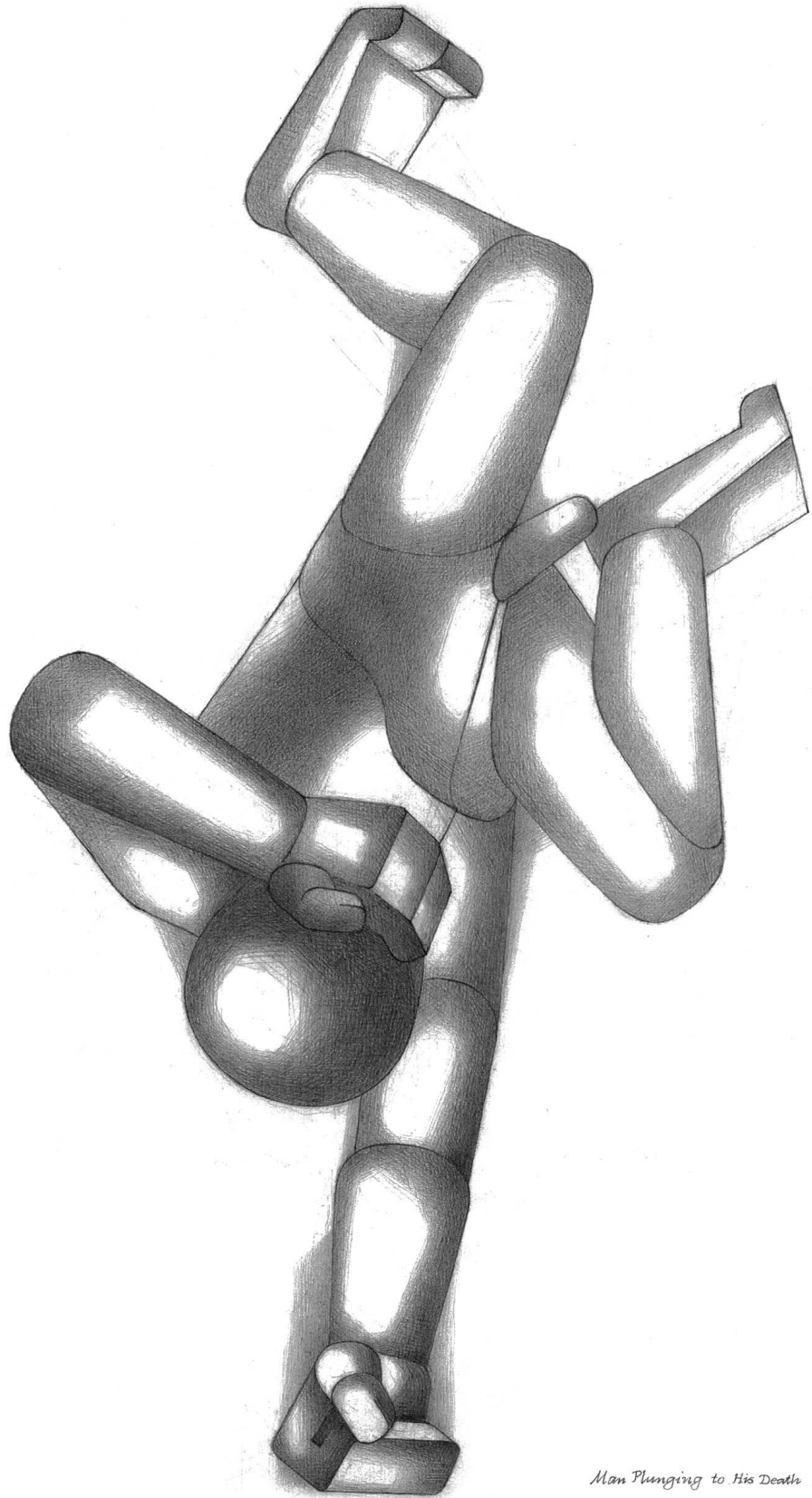


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How the snake got there I never understood. Nor do I know to this day why it should have thrown me into such a panic, for I had been told over and over again that there were no dangerous snakes in this neighborhood. But such things will happen. From childhood on I had been taught to abhor every creeping thing and the little snake quite instinctively made me jump. I lost balance, tried to catch myself by jumping for a much smaller stone that was lying near the riverbed, missed it and landed so unfortunately on the rocks below that I broke both my legs.

I knew by the pain that I had broken them. Then I knew nothing more, for I fainted.

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Man Plunging to His Death J.G. 1975

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How long I lay there, I don't know. When I came to it was quite dark. I saw two shining lights right above my nose. I reached out for a stone and the beast scuttled away. I heard its soft footsteps on the rocks. Then silence and the rush of the water and another fainting spell. But this time when I came to, the moon was out. That was at least some consolation. I would not have to die in the dark. The pain continued to be almost unbearable, but there seems to be a limit to pain, just as there is a definite limit to heat or cold. And so I lay and suffered and had one of the most curious and interesting experiences of my whole life.



For now I experienced for the first time what it felt like to die. I had seen plenty of people pass into the other world. By far the greater part of them had been old men and women, broken by illness and too worn out by the hardships of existence to care very much either one way or the other. Death to them meant relief from monotony and hunger and the eternal grind of making both ends meet. There were a few who clung with almost superhuman obstinacy to the last spark of hope and fought death as bitterly as a pheasant mother fighting for its chicks. But most of them went peacefully to sleep like children who have spent the day on the sea-shore and are tired, very tired. I had often wondered why they showed no greater spirit of rebellion, since life is the only gift of the gods of which we get only one helping, and when that is gone it is gone, and the plate is empty, and the dinner is definitely over. But now I knew.

If it had not been for the excruciating pain in my legs, I would have been really happy. All questions were being answered, all problems were being solved rapidly, quietly and smoothly. Doubt no longer existed in its manifold disturbing and perplexing fashions. At last I knew! For the first time since the day of my birth I was face to face

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with absolute and stark and inevitable Reality. And it was the most agreeable sensation of which I have any recollection. I was going to die. I was going to sleep. The little spark of intelligence and courage and hope and charity which I had borrowed from the Maker of All Things was about to be restored to the original owner. The few pounds of salt and water of which my mortal body was composed were about to be released and returned to the vast treasure-house of nature from which they had been withdrawn when I saw the light of day.

But these things did not seem to matter. I thought of them remotely and rather gratefully. I would never again see the face of my son. But he was a million miles removed from me at that moment. One way or the other, he would surely find his way in this world. I would never again hear the voice of Jean-Louys, of Bernardo, of Rembrandt, of any of my friends. But I felt that they would understand. They would remember little things I had said and done and to them I would be alive until their own hour had struck.

I had one regret. There were women in this world. I had read that some men had found perfect love. I had not. I had missed something. But my work had brought me many consolations that had been denied other less fortunate creatures.



The pain was growing less. I was rapidly sliding down into a deep slumber, the sleep of all eternity, and I was content.

The pain was gone. The rock on which I was lying was soft and warm, a pleasant glow was touching my hands and cheeks. Yes, there was the wonderful old grandfather sitting in his chair and looking at me. “It won’t hurt, my boy. We all must pass down that road some time. It won’t hurt. Just let yourself go – a little more – let yourself go.” The

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moon would soon be hidden by the clouds, it was getting dark. The chimes of the town-hall were playing the hour – tinkelee tinkelee – tinkelee – bang – bang – bang – bang – bang – a flash of pain more hideous than any I had felt before shot through me – bang – bang – it must be seven o'clock – tinkelee – deedledee – dee – no! it was the half hour – bang – bang – nine o'clock – I was moving – I was lying in the arms of one of my Indian guides – bang – bang – it wasn't the clock that was striking – it was the noise of footsteps – the footsteps of the man that carried me – I was being taken somewhere – they had found me – I was not to die that night – I might not die at all – tinkelee – tinkelee – tinkelee – ting – a light was shining in my eyes – the pain was unbearable – I must die – then darkness and silence – I had fainted once more.



When I woke up the sun was shining. I was lying on a soft leather blanket. The hut smelled of fresh straw. The guide who had carried me was sitting by my side. “Sh,” he said, and I closed my eyes and fell asleep once more.

Of what happened during the next few days I have only the haziest recollections, and I am never quite sure whether the things I am writing down are actually part of what I myself remember or whether they are bits of gossip I heard after I had recovered. It seems that my two guides had missed me when they stopped work. It was dark then but somehow or other they were able to follow my tracks and found me. They had carried me to a deserted village from which a small tribe of Cayugas had moved a year or so before. They had found a small wooden house and in this they had made me as comfortable as they could. They knew that I was badly hurt, that I had probably broken both legs, and they were afraid to touch me, for an Indian is always afraid of a sick man.

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But they decided to help me in another way. On the evening of the second day I discovered what they had done. One of the two had stayed behind to take care of me if I should need anything. The other one was gone to get help.



On the evening of that second day, when I was fighting off the delirium of fever, I heard him return. He was not alone. A tall, thin man followed him and knelt down by my side. He was the strangest-looking individual I had ever seen. At first sight I took him for a native. A long leather coat, leather breeches and Indian shoes, long, unkempt and pitch-black hair hanging well down over his shoulders and an enormous knife stuck in his belt. But underneath these heavy outer garments he wore something that looked very much like a cassock, and his face was that of a white man.

I thought that he was a half-breed, and he looked so ferocious that my first impression was, “Why, here is one of the Cayugas who own this village. He has come back to claim his home.” And then I noticed that the fellow wore a heavy silver cross around his neck and I said, “Are you a priest?” and he answered, “Yes, my son, but tonight I am a bone-setter. First I shall pray for you and then I shall fix your legs. Don’t mind the praying, for you shall need it once I get busy with those lower extremities.” And he actually knelt by the side of my bed and reeled off a Latin prayer of which I did not understand one word, and then he got up and removed his coat and rolled up the sleeves of his cassock and, beckoning to the two guides, he said, “Hold his arms,” and once more he knelt by my side and got busy.

As those who have ever broken an arm or a leg well know, even the cleanest break makes an exceedingly painful operation. But two broken legs that have lain neglected for almost three days – no, I had

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better not speak about it. But all through my agony there ran a sort of professional pride in the dexterity with which this unknown man worked. Evidently he knew a good deal about surgery. He made no false movement. If I had to be in hell, he meant to keep me there as short a time as possible.



And I was lying flat on my back again, almost dead from exhaustion, and I was sleeping and I was slowly coming back to life, to find the cabin filled with smoke and one of the two Indians busy making a fire, and outside there was a terrific noise, a whistling, hissing noise, and the walls of the little wooden hut were leaning like the sides of a ship in a storm and I asked the Indian what had happened and he told me it was one of those blizzards which made this part of the country so exceptionally dangerous in winter and that it had come much earlier than they had expected and that it probably would last three or four days and that I must lie very still and not say a word and go back to sleep.

And when I woke up again the hissing, whistling sound was just as strong as ever, but the fire was burning brightly and suddenly I realized that I was going to recover. It might take me six weeks or two months, but I was going to recover, and I had gone through the experience of dying for nothing. Now I would have that experience twice, and truly, few people were ever so favored. And then my unknown doctor friend came in with his arms full of dry leaves (where he had found them, God only knows) and the Indians made me a new bed and then roasted a wild turkey which one of them had shot that morning, and soon that hut on the shores of that lake which did not even bear a name was as full of comfort and warmth and good cheer as the cabin of the Haarlem canal-boat on Saint Nicholas eve.

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The guide, however, had been right. The blizzard continued for three whole days and nights, and all that time I lay quietly in my corner while the others kept the fire going – went out for a couple of hours – returned with pheasants and woodcocks and occasionally with a few berries, and took care of me as if I had been their long lost brother. But on the morning of the fourth day, a Saturday, the white man did not appear for breakfast and, when I asked whether he was not coming, the older one of the Mohawks said, “No, he is gone.” And when I expressed some surprise that he should have left without giving me the opportunity to thank him for all he had done, he answered, “He will come back in two days.” And true enough, on Monday towards the evening, the stranger returned and walked into our hut as unconcernedly as if he had gone just around the corner to get some firewood. And when I said with a feeble attempt at a joke, “You could not keep away from home so long, I suppose,” he replied, “That is right. I had to go back to my people and read Mass and baptize two children, but now I shall stay with you for another five days.”

Afterwards I discovered that “my people” lived some twenty miles away from where we were. In order to read Mass to his people and at the same time take care of his white brother, this strange creature walked twenty miles, through three feet of snow, twice a week, and spent the rest of the time either helping the Indians with their traps, or bringing in firewood, or entertaining me with stories of his travels that made the wanderings of Marco Polo seem like an afternoon’s promenade through the woods between Amsterdam and Naarden. He had been in the New World exactly twenty-five years. He had come to Quebec when he was twenty and had just been ordained. He had been trained in Louvain and, according to all I know of that university (the worst stronghold of the worst form of reactionary feeling in Europe at

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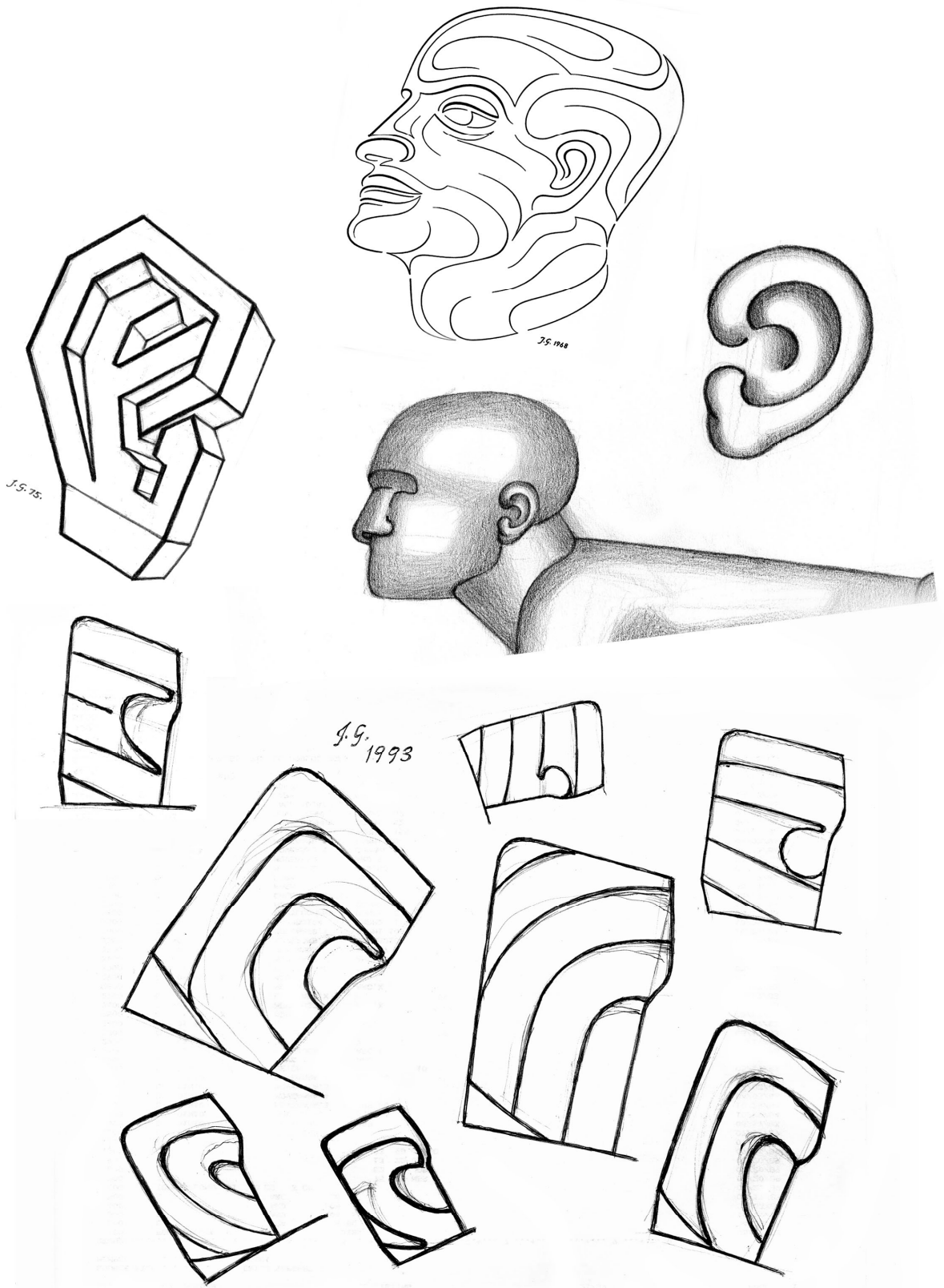
the time of which I am speaking), he ought to have been a self-righteous doctrinary who would regard the death of a heretic as a welcome diversion in the monotony of his deadly missionary existence. But he explained this to me himself.

“It is the wilderness,” he said, “that has done this to me. I suppose I am still a good Catholic. I try to be a faithful son of our holy church, but I am afraid that something has happened to me since I came here that has made me a very different man from the rigid-minded boy who left Quebec in 1622.

Last year they sent someone from Canada to try and find me and tell me that I was entitled to a fourteen months’ holiday and could go home for a rest. But I thought that I had better not return to civilization. My Bishop would lift his eyebrows and say, ‘Cha! Cha! A few years in a big city would do you no harm,’ and very likely he would suggest that I be called to Bordeaux or Lyon or even Paris to give me a rest from my arduous labors, a sort of reward for faithful service, a reward that would last me the rest of my days.

And some other man would be sent out here in place of myself, and all the work I have done here would go to ruin in less than a fortnight. And my dear Cayugas would be what they were when I came here, and I would have lost my ears for nothing.”

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“Lost your ears?” I asked.

“Yes, he said, “that is why I wear my hair à l’Indienne. It happened the first year I was here.

“I had settled down in a village on the second one of the Big Lakes. Right among the Eries. The Eries were at war with the Senecas. You know how those Indian wars are. They begin about some trifle, a stolen halter or a nasty look from one chief to another. They flame up suddenly like a prairie fire and before you can say, ‘My children, what is it all about?’ a hundred villages have been wiped out. This time the Eries happened to win. The rumor spread among the Five Nations that the Eries were being helped by a great white sorcerer. They decided to get hold of that sorcerer to break the power of the lake-dwellers.

“I went about my business as if I did not know that there was a war. One night, going to visit a village at a little distance from the shore, I was waylaid by a bunch of Cayugas who had come to the assistance of the Senecas. They tied me to a stake in the regular Indian fashion and were going to carve me slowly to pieces. They began with my ears. It was much less painful than you would imagine. Just then the Eries, who did not want to lose their miracle man, rushed the village, killed a dozen or so of the Cayugas and took the others prisoner. It was their turn to be tied to a number of trees and listen to the most impassioned among the Erie warriors tell them what they were going to do to them before they killed them.

“To begin with, their ears were to come off. I had lost mine, now they were to lose theirs. As a compliment to me, you understand. I was pretty weak from the loss of blood, but I got up (I spoke Erie fluently) and told them that they were fools and knaves and deserved to be punished by God for their wanton cruelty, and I took the knife which they were sharpening for the ear-operations and cut the ropes with which the prisoners had been bound and gagged and told them that they were free. A terribly risky thing to do, but it worked and the Eries and the Cayugas made peace.

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“Well, they heard about this in Quebec and the Bishop was not pleased. We Jesuits are always suspected of being a little too independent. Someone traveled all the way from Quebec to the lake to remonstrate with me and tell me that I ought not to have acted quite so independently. If the Eries and the Nations meant to destroy each other (a policy which was not regarded with disfavor in the capital) it was their good right to do so and I should not interfere. I should ‘refer’ everything to headquarters. That was the express will and desire of His Highness, the Governor General.

“I asked the Episcopal emissary whether I ought to have asked the permission of His Grace to have my ears cut off and he answered that I knew perfectly well what he meant and that I had better look for some other field of activity, for my usefulness among the Eries had come to an end. I took the hint and went to the land of the Cayugas. They were surprised to see me. They suffered from a bad conscience and they told me so and said that they were afraid that I had only come to punish them. But I told them frankly that I had chosen their land as my place of residence because they were terribly savage, had no conception of decency or kindness or charity and that I had come to teach them those virtues.

“I have now been among them for fifteen years. I have baptized some nine thousand men, women and children during that period. I have learned a little medicine (as you may remember to your horror), I have built a sort of hospital and a school where I teach the girls how to take better care of their children, a strange job for a man in my position, and I have enticed a few young priests away from the fleshpots of Quebec and Montreal (it is a new city, but full of worldliness they tell me), and I have founded a small republic of kindness right here in the heart of the great American wilderness. But I am grateful that the voyage to Canada is so difficult, for if my dear Bishop should ever deign to visit me, I fear that that would be the last of my noble experiment, where Christ resembles an Indian chief and God himself bears a close likeness to the Great Spirit whom the natives have worshiped since the beginning of time.”



Virgin Mary with Jesus – 1980s

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I saw the “noble experiment” a few weeks later, as soon as I could be transported. It was a cold voyage, but I suffered no harm and I spent three very happy months with Father Ambrosius, for he was a native of Grasse in southern France, where his father was a honey-merchant and he himself had spent his childhood among the bees and had even taken the name of that stern Milanese bishop who was also the patron saint of the Apiarian guild.

I could not yet walk a great deal, but the weather was very bad and I did not miss much. During the day I spent my time composing a French-Dutch-Cayugan dictionary, more to have something to do than from any desire to turn philologist. But when evening came, the two of us would sit in front of the large open fire, which the grateful parishioners always kept well-supplied with fuel, and we would talk.

And this was a novel and exceedingly pleasant experience to me, because now for the first time in my life I was face to face with a Christian whom I could not only admire, but like – a fine man, even a noble man, a cheerful man of infinite good humor, a patient and humble man who went quietly ahead and did as much good as he could without spending any vain regrets upon the harm his neighbors were supposed to be doing to him. And one evening we had it out in a session that lasted till early dawn.



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It began with a confession-of-sins on my part. I told him frankly that I had such an intense dislike for the usual professional Christians that it was difficult for me to be even commonly decent to them. Wherever and whenever I had met them I had found them mean and intolerant and suspicious and of a self-righteous arrogance which made it practically impossible for an ordinary human being to associate with them and keep his temper or self-respect.

“But,” the Father asked, “are you quite fair? Don’t you mix up two things that are entirely different? Remember even in the days of the Emperor Titus, all Jews were not alike. There were the Pharisees and the Sadducees and there were those who left father and mother and glory and riches to follow a certain carpenter from Nazareth. And what have you ever seen of the latter?”

I confessed that I had run across very few of these, and then Father Ambrosius made the casual remark that was to change my entire point of view. “Life,” he said, “is not real. It is based upon fairy tales. It all depends upon the story we prefer.”

It was a somewhat cryptic utterance. I said, “Continue. I vaguely think that I know what you are driving at, but I am not sure.” And he went on. “You see, most people think of life in terms of hungry people chasing little rabbits and catching them and killing them and eating them up, and they make a great ado about our ‘daily bread,’ as if our daily bread were the most important thing in the world. It is important, of course. We have got to eat if we want to live, but that is only part of existence. Even these poor, benighted savages are not out there in the fields catching rabbits all day long. Sometimes they catch so many that they have food enough for a fortnight. That means thirteen days of leisure. Then, not being upset by the fear of an empty stomach, they can dwell in the realm of the imagination – of that sphere which some people have called ‘other worldliness.’ Then they compose their fairy stories, or they talk about the fairy stories of their ancestors, or they embellish the ancestral fairy story with a few details of their own, according to the temper of the times and the change in their form of

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living. You see, it is really very simple. Their daily bread keeps their bodies alive, but their souls would die without that daily ration of fairy stories.”



That seemed a pretty radical speech on the part of a priest and I gave expression to my astonishment by a question. “But surely,” I asked him, “you are not going to claim that your religion, your church, all this” – and I waved my hand towards the wall which was covered with crude pictures of saints made by one of the Cayuga chiefs who had a bent for painting – “surely, you don’t mean to say that this is merely your particular fairy story?”

“Yes,” he answered quite casually. “Of course I would not confess this to my Bishop, and that is one of the reasons why I am just as well satisfied if His Grace remains quietly in his palace in Quebec and lets me stay here. But, yes, this is my fairy tale. It consists of three words, ‘Love one another.’ Three words spoken on a barren hillside of that brutal land called Judea. The fairy story part – the incredible part, is this, that they were ever uttered at all – that someone in this world – in this world of greed and lust and hatred and cruelty, had the unbelievable courage to utter them.

“That is my fairy story, that someone had the unbelievable courage to utter them.

“But, of course, that isn’t enough for most people. It is a little too simple. Too spiritual, perhaps. They don’t want to know what Jesus said. They want to know what he wore, how he looked, how he had brushed his hair that morning. That is their fairy story, a tale of outward and inconsequential details. But they are entitled to it if it pleases their fancy and satisfies their curiosity. They are entitled to it and should not

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be interfered with, no matter how absurd their ideas may appear to us who believe ourselves to be living on a somewhat higher intellectual plane. And what I say of my fellow-Christians I would maintain about all people....”

“The heathen included?” I interrupted.

“The heathen included, and even those who call themselves ‘agnostics.’ For their fairy story tells them that there isn’t any fairy story at all, and that in itself is the strangest fairy story of all.”

I shook my head and said only one word, “Quebec!”

“You are quite right,” Father Ambrosius continued. “If His Grace knew about this, shall I say ‘slight variation’ upon the somewhat more rigid articles of faith which are read every day in his cathedral (these slight variations on his own fairy tale, in the terms in which I see the world), there would be trouble. Or no. His Grace is much too subtle a diplomat to cause trouble. I would be promoted to some higher post in the interior of France, where they would let me lead the singing on Sunday, or I would be called to the capital to instruct the sons and daughters of our nobility in the rudiments of the French language. But never again would I be allowed to utter a single syllable that had to do with a religious subject and I would die a most respectable and peaceful death, whereas now I shall probably try to interfere in the next war with the Hurons and be slowly roasted to death over one of their famous greenwood fires and that will be the end.



“But in the meantime I am having a glorious time. I am successful. My method has proved the right one, the only possible one, at least in this part of the world.

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“Can you see what chance I would have if I had come here and had said, ‘My dear children of the forest, everything you believe and hold true and sacred is just so much hocus-pocus. I despise it, and to show you the depth of my contempt I shall spit upon your gods, I shall curse them and I shall take a hammer and shall destroy them’?”

“Not a person would have listened to me. Or if perchance they had taken the trouble to listen, they would have tied me to a tree and would have left me to the mercy of their dogs. They are a pretty savage lot, even today. Don’t ask me what they were like twenty years ago.

“No! That system never would have worked. I had to go about my business in a very different way, if I wanted to have them listen to me. And so I came here one day accompanied by an old Canadian trapper who knew this region and who had married a Cayuga woman, way back in the early days of Champlain, and who had been with him when he started on his famous voyage to China and ended in Lake Huron.



“It was a dangerous trip, let me assure you. My guide spoke the dialect fluently and he could claim relationship with one of the chiefs who lived on the next lake. Otherwise we probably would have been killed right away.

“Champlain was a great leader, a wise man in many ways, but like so many of our race, he must play a part, wherever he was – must pose a little before the crowd – must show everybody what a fine fellow a Frenchman could be. I don’t blame him. Those pious people who pride themselves upon the fact that they never ‘show off’ usually have very little to show. But upon occasion that attitude can be a nuisance and sometimes it becomes a downright danger.

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“When the Hurons and the Five Nations tried to slaughter each other, Champlain would have done well to leave them alone. He could then have concluded a treaty with the victors and in that way he would have strengthened our position along the Saint Lawrence. I am not now talking as a minister of the Gospel. I am talking plain, ordinary common sense from the point of view of an explorer or a statesman or a colonial governor – of someone, in short, who wants to found a colony in the heart of a wilderness filled with painted savages. But, no, Champlain must take his little blunderbuss and when the Hurons and the Nations have their little quarrel, he must join the fray and do a little shooting of his own, and having come from the North, he can’t help but be on the side of the Hurons and his bullets kill a couple of the braves who are leading the armies of the Nations, and thereafter, of course, these good people hated us like poison or like traitors (very much the same in my opinion) and any Frenchman who went to the southern banks of the Saint Lawrence did so at the risk of his own life.

“I was very young in those days and terribly interested in my work. I had not the slightest leaning toward martyrdom. But it never entered into my head that I could be killed. Of course I was not going to be killed! I was so absolutely convinced that no harm would come to me that I refused to take a gun. Finally I let myself be persuaded to take a small hunting rifle, but I decided that I would not use it when I got near to a native village. Just to show them how well I meant.



“The old trapper and I crossed Lake Champlain and went west. First through the land of the Oneidas, where we met no one (they had suffered terribly from the smallpox during the last four years) and then we cut through part of the mountains that belonged to the Mohawks and finally we reached the dreaded region of the Cayugas. After about ten days we struck the first settlement. The trapper explained who he was

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and how his wife had died the year before and how he was now on his way to see her relatives and bring them some trinkets she had left and some money. That sounded plausible enough and they believed it.

“But what was I doing there? Was I a spy sent by the French who had turned against them when they were fighting the Hurons and the Algonquins? I reassured them. I was a Frenchman, but I was merely a ‘learned man,’ a sort of ‘medicine man’ who went through the world listening to the stories the different nations could tell me about their gods. Some of these were quite interesting and some of them were not quite so interesting, but I had heard that the Cayugas and Senecas had a God that was more powerful than those of any other race on earth.

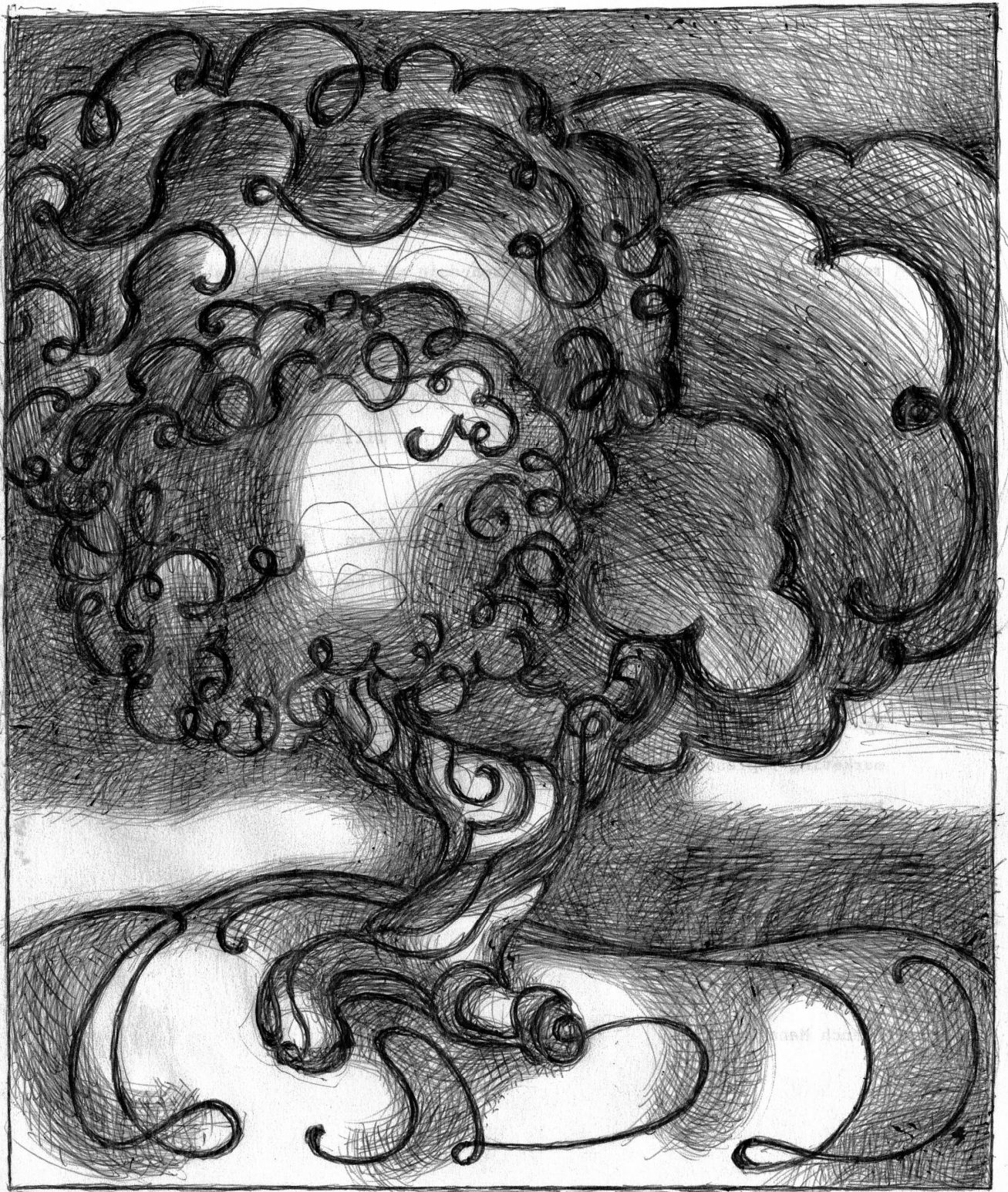
“Well, that flattered their pride and while my Canadian trapper was paying a visit to his ex-relatives-in-law, I sat and listened to the Old Men from one village after another while they told me about their Great Spirit and their Evil Spirit and of the mysterious magic powers, the so-called ‘secret soul’ that lay buried in every man and in every cloud and in every blade of grass and in every grasshopper and even in the arrows which they shot at their enemies.



“When I had listened for almost six months and knew all there was to be learned, I told them how tremendously interested I had been in what they had told me. And then I appealed to their sense of fair play (which as a rule is very strongly developed among these fighting races, much more strongly than among the peaceful tribes) and I said, ‘Now you have told me your story of how the world was created and who rules it and what the evil spirits try to do to us to make us unhappy, and now you ought to listen to my story.’ They answered that that was right and

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as it should be, and so I built myself a small altar out in the open, near the shore of the lake underneath a very large tree, as fine a setting for the house of our Lord as one could hope to find on either land or sea.



Oak Tree – 1980s

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“Then I began to tell them very slowly and very gradually (and I hope rather tactfully) what my story was and why I thought it better than theirs. And by the grace of God and through the mercy of His saints, I was successful. I was able to show these poor children of darkness the way to the Light. And today nine of the frontier villages that belong to this tribe have accepted my story. They have given up the way of the heathen and have confessed themselves Christians. Truly, Heaven has blessed me far beyond my merits.”



Here Father Ambrosius stopped talking and he looked at me as if he expected me to give him an answer. But I could say nothing. All my life long I had heard of the faith that moved mountains and here I suddenly stood in the presence of the greatest of all miracles, the miracle of absolute and unquestioning simplicity of heart.

It was a strange experience, and I was still sitting in silence when Father Ambrosius got up and went to his bedroom to get his moccasins and his coat.

“I am sorry that I shall have to leave you for a little while,” he said, “but things are not well in the village. The people seem restless. They are in fear of something and I don’t know what. I think that I have taught them to look upon life in a more reasonable and intelligent way. But such things take time. Once in a while their old devils whom I chased away some fifteen years ago try to come back, and then I have to fight hard to hold my own. This seems to be one of those occasions. What has happened this time is still a mystery to me, but I shall probably know in another two or three weeks. Meanwhile it won’t do any harm if I am seen about the village a little more than usual. It gives my children a feeling of confidence. ‘Behold,’ they say, ‘the Father is

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about watching over us and all is well.' Don't wait for me. Don't sit up for me. It may take me a couple of hours. Go to bed and happy dreams!"

And he left me and I hobbled to my couch and the room was filled with a strange light and when I looked out of the window, behold – the sky was a bright red, and first I thought that it must be the northern lights, which had been particularly brilliant the last few days. But then I noticed that the glow came from the west and with a shock I realized what had happened. Someone had set fire to a village on the other side of the lake.



Pine Tree on a Promontory – 1987

End of a Fairy Tale

Chapter 35

A FAIRY TALE IN THE WILDERNESS AND WHAT BECAME OF IT



Poor Father Ambrosius! The next two weeks were the most miserable of his whole life. Everything he had worked for came tumbling down with a crash, and a smoldering ruin was all that remained of his efforts of the last twenty years.

I did not see the end. I only saw the beginning, and that was sad enough. For this was not merely a physical defeat of a man pitched against a group of enemies, it was the moral debacle of a fine and noble and courageous soul, beaten by the innate stupidity of nature-in-the-raw.

The good Father thought that his “fairy tale” had triumphed. He had filled the dreadful universe of these naked savages with the visions of his paradise – his wondrous heaven populated with beautiful angels and long-bearded beneficent saints – a realm of endless golden streets

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and infinite shining righteousness – the future home of all good little children willing to share his dream. And they had said, “Yea, verily, great Master.” And they had come to hear him say Mass and they had sent their children to listen to the wondrous chronicles of the Holy Family of Nazareth. And their women had stayed after service to weep over the fate of one who had been utterly without blemish and yet had taken upon himself the agonizing task of shouldering this world’s sins. And invariably when he had asked them whether they regretted having given up a belief in the gods of their fathers, they had answered him that nothing on earth could make them return to the worship of those false witnesses, and he had been happy and he had persuaded himself that they spoke the truth.

But alas and alack! Without a single word of warning the old gods of the forest had suddenly reappeared from the mountain fastnesses wherein they had been hiding these many years. They had come proud and haughty as exiled princes who claim what is theirs by right of birth, and their trembling subjects had welcomed them with open arms. Not because they loved them better than their new rulers. By no means.

These ancient task-masters of their souls were dreadful tyrants. But they were flesh and blood of their own flesh and blood. They knew them and understood them, even though they hated and despised them. And when they stood once more outside the village-gate, waving the familiar old banners that had been handed down from father to son for thousands and thousands of generations, the humble subjects were as little birds before the gaze of the snake. They wavered. They grew pale. They fell upon their knees. They prostrated themselves in the dust of the road and whispered, “Yes, ye great and glorious Majesties, we thy servants welcome thee with open hearts and open arms.”

And everything was as it had been since the beginning of time, and the work of Father Ambrosius disappeared as the smoke of one’s fire on the shores of a stormy sea.



Demon over the Susquehanna – 1976

End of a Fairy Tale



And all that because two little boys had tried to shoot the same wild turkey at the same moment and had had a quarrel as to who had seen him first.

As far as we could make out, this is what had happened. Those so-called Indian countries are not countries in our sense of the word. The Indians live by hunting. Here and there a tribe that is a little more civilized than the others will try its hand at agriculture. Or, to be more precise, the Indian men will allow their women to try their hand at raising corn and grain, for the average Indian male is a noble grand-seigneur, brave as a lion when he is on the war-path, but lazy as the sloth when he is peacefully residing at home. Those tribes therefore need enormous tracts of land to keep themselves provided with the necessary number of deer and rabbits and bears that are needed for their daily support. And these hunting fields are not clearly defined tracts of land, for there are no frontiers as we know them in Europe, but the Indian has a great respect for tradition and as a rule he respects the domain that is supposed to belong to his neighbor with scrupulous care. But once in a while these pieces of land overlap each other and then there is always a chance for trouble. And that is what had occurred in this case.

It seems that, several centuries before, the Eries, who now lived further westward, had occupied this part of the continent. But, although they spent the greater part of each year on the shores of one of those big lakes that exist in the West and that many hold to be part of the Arctic Sea or even the Pacific Ocean, they still retained a vague hold upon certain rivers and brooks that ran through the land of the Cayugas and every year a number of Eries would walk all the way from their own country to that of the Cayugas (for these savages have never learned the

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use of the wheel and must carry everything on their own backs if they want to go anywhere), to spend a few weeks hunting turkeys and other small birds within the grounds that hundreds of years before had belonged to their ancestors.

It was a very unpractical arrangement, but the Cayugas respected the claims of the Eries because they had always done so, which in their language means a number of years all the way from twenty-five to a hundred. For when an Indian has once done something “always” he will continue to do so until the end of eternity.

This particular winter the Eries seemed to have come east a little earlier than usual. Perhaps there was some other reason for their unexpected appearance. There had been vague rumors of trouble between the Eries and those Hurons who lived on the other side of the big lake. It seemed that the Eries had suffered a severe defeat and that they were trying to get away before the coming of spring allowed the Hurons to descend upon them in full force.



But I only heard about this much later when I was safely back in Nieuw Amsterdam and, besides, it made very little difference how and why the Eries had come at such an early date. They were there and that was enough or, in this case, too much.

For one morning an Erie boy of about fourteen had gone forth turkey hunting and a Cayuga boy of the same age had started upon the same errand and, by a most unfortunate combination of circumstances, the two had seen the same turkey at the same moment. Each one of them had shot his arrow and both arrows had hit the mark. The turkey was dead and the boys had rushed eagerly forward to get hold of their prey. And then they had seen each other. And of course they had both grabbed

End of a Fairy Tale

at the dead bird and then one had said, “It is mine, I saw it first.” And the other one had answered, “No, it is mine. I saw it first.”

And then they had dared each other to touch it, and then they had fought but, being of equal height and weight, the struggle had lasted quite a long time. Then one of them had lost his temper and he had pulled his knife and stabbed the other boy in the back, and then he had taken fright and had run away, leaving the corpse out in the open.

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But in his excitement he had forgotten his knife, and therefore a small band of Cayugas, also looking for turkeys in that neighborhood and finding the body, had known that it had been an Erie who had committed this murder and a little later, meeting two peaceful Erie women going to a brook to do their washing, they had set upon them and had killed them, for such was the law of the tribe, or rather, such had been the law of the tribe until Father Ambrosius had tried to replace this dreadful code of an eye for an eye by the more merciful doctrine of a forgiveness which had first been promulgated on a hillside in distant Palestine.

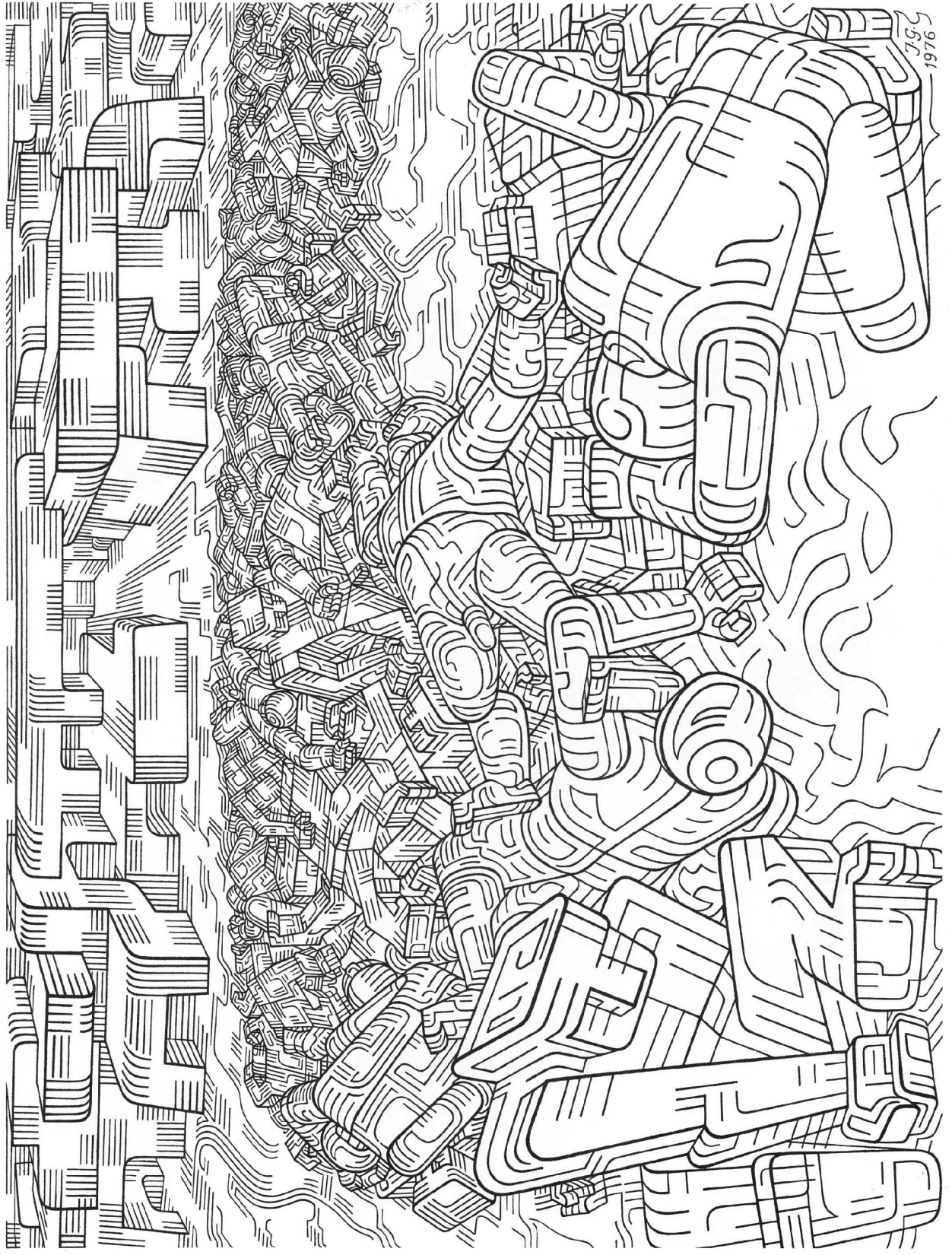


But now they had smelled blood and everything they had learned during the last twenty years had been forgotten. They were Cayuga warriors and one of their clan had been killed without provocation. Such an action demanded revenge. And with a fell cry of joy, the ancient gods came rushing forth from their hiding places and joined in the fray. Before another week had passed, at least two dozen people had been killed on both sides. And when Father Ambrosius tried to remonstrate with his beloved children about the folly of such a course, they would listen patiently enough, but they would not let themselves be convinced. “Your God, who is now also our God, is a lover of peace! But the god of our enemies is a lover of war! Just now, he is stronger than your God and we must turn to our old gods to help us, lest we all perish.”

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They were genuinely sorry that all this had happened, but it had happened, and they did not intend to accept defeat without putting up a terrific fight. The God of Father Ambrosius told them to turn the other cheek. They were very sorry, but no Cayuga had ever turned the other cheek unless in the game of love. They were more than sorry, they were humbly apologetic.

But for the moment there was only one thing for them to do and they meant to do it. And every night they would leave their villages and go murdering and pillaging among the villages of the Eries. And every night the Eries would go murdering and pillaging among the villages of the Cayugas. And a vast number of people were killed and an enormous amount of material damage was done, and nothing was ever decided. But gradually the Eries, who had got heavy reinforcements from the West, began to be more and more aggressive and the red glow that had lighted up the sky the night before was the first of the Cayuga settlements that had gone up in flames.



End of a Fairy Tale



The question was, when would we ourselves be attacked!?! If it had been a few months later, the other four nations would undoubtedly have come to our support. But it had been a very severe winter and the roads were so thickly covered with snow that our messengers would need at least two weeks to reach the camps of the Oneidas and the Onondagas. In the meantime, we knew that we were left entirely to our own devices.

An effort was made to surround our village with a wooden palisade, but the ground was frozen so hard that it was very slow work. Only a few yards were done when we heard that the community nearest to ours had been attacked during the previous night and that every man, woman and child had died fighting. Our town was to come next, and the situation was exceedingly serious.

Twice Father Ambrosius had tried to get in touch with the leaders of the Erie band, but they had refused to meet him. They were afraid of this mysterious man whose reputation had traveled all through the land of the Indians and who was thought to be possessed of some magic charm that made him invulnerable. Indeed, so far did this respect for the person of Father Ambrosius go, that the Eries sent one of their chiefs to our camp under a flag of truce to tell the Father that he was at liberty to go back to his own people any time he cared to do so. He was even offered a safe conduct through the land of the Eries if he wished to travel to Quebec by way of the River of Canada.

The good Father answered that he could not possibly return to his own people since at that very moment he was among those whom he considered his own people, and he used the opportunity to suggest to the Erie chieftain that he and the Cayugas bury the hatchet or, if they could

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not do that, declare a truce to find out whether the matter could not be settled by the payment of an indemnity. After all, boys would be boys and hot-tempered boys would occasionally do very foolish things, such as killing each other for the sake of a turkey that was not worth the hilt of a single knife. But that was no reason why grown-up men should do war upon each other and should destroy whole townships and should slaughter hundreds of innocent women and children, all of it because “the honor of the tribe had been touched,” and he used the opportunity to tell the story of the Great White God, who had come into this world to teach all men that they are each other’s brethren. But the Erie Chief merely listened and, although he listened most politely, he said nothing, but drew his blanket around him, turned on his heels and departed whence he had come without uttering a single word.



That evening Father Ambrosius turned to me as we were having our supper and casually remarked, “I have ordered your Mohawk guides to be here at seven in the morning. You won’t be able to walk very far, but I have shown them how to make a stretcher and they will be able to carry you part of the way.” And I answered, trying to be just as casual, “That is very kind of you, but of course I shall not go.”

“But why not? I have got to stay. I have based my whole life upon the fantastic belief that love will be able to overcome all the evil of this world. Since I have been willing to live by it, I ought also to be willing to die for it. But you, you are a free man and you ought to go.”

I agreed. “Yes, I suppose I should go, but we have a proverb at home – one of those homely little sayings that are drummed into our ears when we are still very young, until they become part of our philosophy of life, and that proverb bids me stay.”

End of a Fairy Tale

“I would like to hear it.”

“It is a very simple one. ‘Out together, home together.’ I don’t suppose that that is a very elegant translation, but it has the virtue of being quite accurate. And when we were boys, it served a purpose. If we went on a trip together, no matter what adventures might befall us, we never thought of turning backward until all our comrades were safe and ready for the return trip. I am here. I stay here. And if we die, we die together. Then I shall at least have someone to show me the way to the Pearly Gate and that will be very pleasant.”

Shortly afterwards Father Ambrosius made ready for his customary evening’s round and I hobbled off to bed. I was still very weak and the cold weather caused my legs to ache a great deal more than they had done during the milder weeks early in February. Father Ambrosius had noticed that I tossed around a great deal of the night and he had made me a sleeping potion out of a plant which grew all over the hills near our lake and which bore a close resemblance to the Valeriana Officialis of our apothecary shops at home. It had a pungent smell and an acid taste. That evening, I noticed that the acid taste was stronger than usual, but I paid no attention to this, as I had caught a cold a few days before and my sense of smell and of taste was not functioning any too well. I took off my coat and hat but kept on the rest of my clothes and went to bed.



When I woke up, I was lying on a stretcher on the ground. It was snowing hard, but on one side a roughly made lean-to offered me some protection against the storm that was raging and it had also acted as a barrier against the snow. My two Mohawk guides, bundled up in their blankets, were sitting by my side.

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“We thought that we might be able to keep you a little warmer this way,” they explained. “As soon as the storm grows less, we shall try and make a fire.”

I said, “Never mind the fire. Pick me up and take me back.”

But they neither answered, nor did they make the slightest effort to get up. I grew angry and reached for the gun that I had seen lying by my side, but one of the Mohawks whispered, “We unloaded it by special orders.” And then I understood everything.

But how did it happen that I had not awakened when they put me on the stretcher? And then I remembered the strange taste of my sedative the night before. In order to save me, Father Ambrosius had taken his precautions carefully and in order to be sure that I left, he had drugged me. For one addicted to fairy tales, the good priest had shown himself a good deal of a realist.

Well, there I was, and what was I to do next? Go back, but how was I to walk all that distance in that raging storm, I who had not walked a mile by myself during the last three or four months? I needed the help of my Mohawks if I were to accomplish anything at all and, in order to gain their good will, I had to proceed very carefully and use tact. I first asked them what time it was and they told me that as far as they could make out it was two hours after sunrise.

When had they taken me away from the village?

They thought that it was shortly before midnight. The Father had come to them earlier in the evening and had told them to be ready to start in about three hours. They had packed their belongings and the Father had given them each an old-fashioned arquebus and four loaves of bread. Then they had sat in their tent and had waited until he came back. The Cayugas had not expected an attack that night on account of the threatening blizzard and had mostly stayed indoors. Shortly before midnight, Father Ambrosius had called for them and had conducted them to his cabin where I lay in so deep a sleep that at first they thought

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I was dead. They had put me on the stretcher and then the good Father had taken them to the outskirts of the village and had told them to make for the hills and not stop until it was daylight. I asked them whether he had given them any message. They said “No, he made the sign of the cross over you before he left and then returned to the camp and never looked back once. Then we picked you up and here we are.”

I asked them what they meant to do and they said we would continue our way eastward as soon as the weather should improve a little.

I asked them whether they had heard anything all during the night and they nodded yes, and I asked them whether it had been bad, and they said, “Yes, very bad. Everything must have been burned down.” And I asked them whether they would help me return and they answered no, and I called them cowards and pigeon-hearted turntails and all the other terrible names for which an Indian under ordinary circumstances will kill even his own father or brother. But they took it calmly and answered, “We are neither cowards nor pigeon-hearted turntails. We are only obeying the Father’s instructions, because we love him.” And as I was too weak to walk by myself, I had to submit, and the next morning it stopped snowing and they built me a small sledge and placed me on it and wrapped me in their own warm blankets and we slowly and painfully began our voyage towards the east.

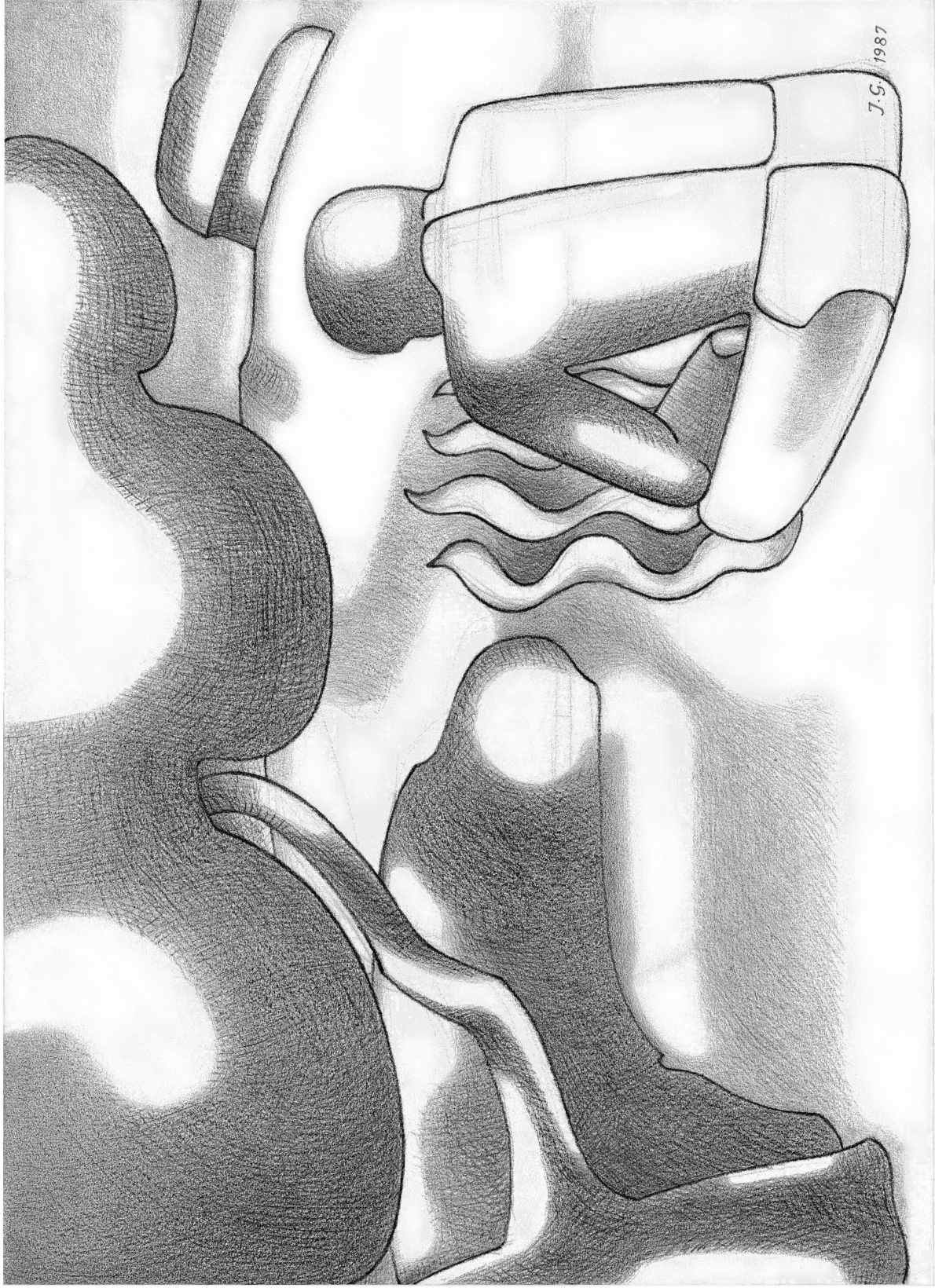
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After five days we reached the first village of the Oneidas and when we told our story we were most kindly received by the Chief, who gave us his own tent to live in and himself went to stay with his father-in-law, and I paid my two Mohawks, who had been most faithful in their duties, and gave them a letter to My Lord Stuyvesant in Nieuw Amsterdam, recommending them to him very seriously and suggesting that they be given some token of recognition by the Company.

And I remained with the Oneidas until May when the snow had melted and the trails were passable once more.





End of a Fairy Tale



Then members of all the Oneida tribe gathered in a valley near our camp and we went to a place which is called Owasco in their language, and there we waited until the forces of all the Five Nations had come together and we marched against the Eries.

When I asked permission to join the expedition, they told me that they would be very pleased if I would come, for they had heard that I was a famous medicine man (the old story of the Mohawk chief whom I had cured more than a year before, something which seemed to have made a profound impression upon the whole neighborhood). For the first time in my life I found myself obliged to sit on top of a horse, a strange and terrible experience, as the animal moved all four feet at the same time and had the most uncomfortable habit of trying to nibble the buds of the shrubs we passed and of stopping in the middle of the rivers. But I was rapidly regaining my strength and, if it had not been for the particular circumstances under which I was taking the trip, I would have enjoyed myself thoroughly.

After six days of trekking (there were about three hundred of us and we moved very slowly) we approached the neighborhood of the lake where the quarrel between the Eries and the Cayugas had taken place the previous winter. But we could find no trace of the former. They had apparently been warned by their scouts and had completely disappeared.

We afterwards heard what had happened to them after they had fled. A strong band of Senecas had tried to intercept them on their way to the Big Lake and in order to escape from any possible ambushes they had swung a little towards the south. In this way they had been obliged to pass through the territory of the Susquehannocks, who had surprised them one evening, just when they were pitching camp, and

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who after a short but fierce battle had killed every man, woman and child of them and had left their bodies to rot where they lay.

Such had been the end of an absurd little quarrel that had arisen when two boys had tried to capture the same turkey.



With the enemy gone, there was really nothing for us to do but return whence we had come. But I wanted to see the spot where I knew that my dear friend must have met his death, and early one morning, accompanied by about a hundred warriors, I marched to the spot where our village had been located only a short time before. The snow had melted and the country was glorious with the flowers of spring. But the Eries had done their work so well that it took me the greater part of the morning to find the exact location where the massacre had taken place. Of the tents of the Indians nothing remained, but at last we discovered an ash heap and I decided that that had been the house in which I had spent the winter. Strangely enough, we found no skeletons, but the chief who was with me assured me that this was nothing unusual.

“The Eries would have been afraid of the ghosts of those they had slain unless they had first got rid of their corpses. They must either have buried them or they have thrown them in the lake, for as we all know, those who go down in that lake are never again found, as the spirit that dwells at the bottom keeps them there and makes them his slaves.”

I had heard of this custom and was familiar with the fear the aborigines felt towards their dead. When the chief asked me whether I was ready to return, I said “Yes,” for the scene was full of sad memories for me and there was no use in my staying there any longer.

End of a Fairy Tale



But ere we broke camp I walked to the big oak tree that stood near the lake and underneath which Father Ambrosius had first explained the beautiful mysteries of his fairy tale to a curious group of old men and women. The tree had been left standing. It was the only one that not been damaged by the fire. I walked past it to go to the lake when I saw a black object lying amidst the violets and dandelions which covered the hillside. I went nearer and looked at it. It was a skeleton dressed in a long, black cassock. It was lying on its back and the arms were spread wide. The empty sockets were facing the sky. Three arrows with little green feathers at the end were sticking out of his chest. And there Father Ambrosius had written “finis” to his fairy story.



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In the Flowers of the Meadow – 2011

(Study done for this project, using simple color patches,
after loss of eyesight to Macular Degeneration)

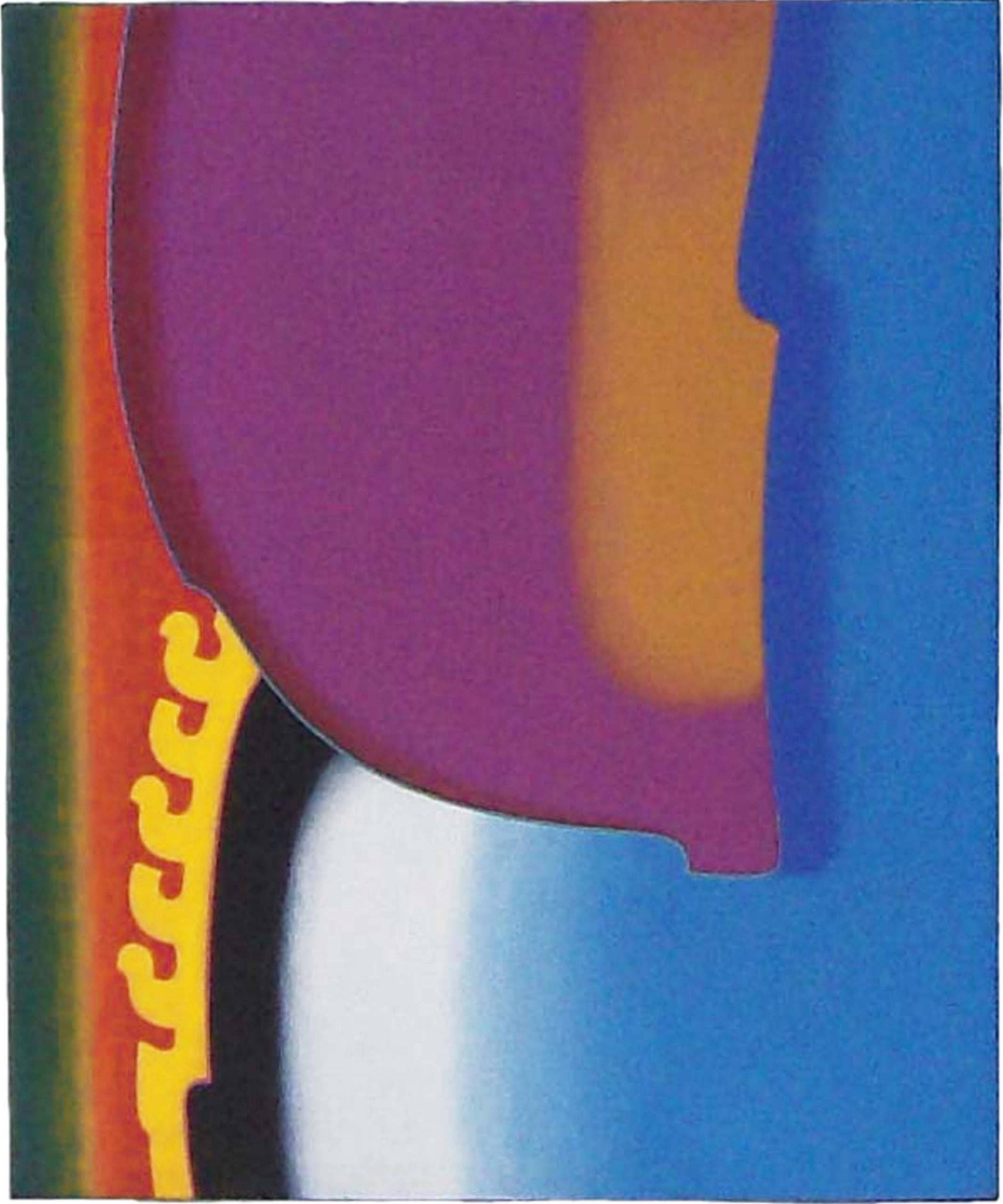
End of a Fairy Tale

We buried him where he lay and placed some heavy stones upon his grave, and I carved a crude cross upon one of these and scratched the initials F.A. on both sides and after a little hesitation I added the letters S.J. Then I knelt down and said a prayer – for the first and last time in my life – and asked God to be very kind to the sweetest man I had ever met and let him dwell in that part of Paradise where the little children lived who still remembered what all the grown-ups had forgotten. Then I went back to the others, and an hour later we were on top of the nearest hill and had our final glimpse of the lake.



And ever since I have wondered whether I had been the last white man to cast his eyes upon this lovely landscape which is so far away from the civilized world that even the most ambitious hunters and farmers will never dream of settling down there.

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Bernardo's Choice

Chapter 36

NEWS FROM HOME



When I returned to Nieuw Amsterdam I discovered that my prolonged absence had caused great consternation. Bernardo, who was apparently still staying with his Mohawk friends, had written to Captain de Vries to tell him of the rumors he had heard about me: that I had reached the ultimate confines of the land belonging to the Five Nations – that I had met with an accident – that I was being taken care of in the house of an Indian chief near one of the smaller lakes a few miles east of the Pacific Ocean – and that I had probably been killed during the famous raid of the Chickasaws against the Onondagas early in the winter of that year.

This strange hodge-podge of information and misinformation had made the excellent captain take a special trip to the capital to try and

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obtain some further details from the hunters and trappers who gathered together every spring to sell their beaver and bear skins to the traders of the Company. They had indeed heard of some commotion in the region of the small lakes, but some thought it had been a quarrel between the Oneidas and the Algonquins and others knew for certain that it had been merely a little border skirmish between the Cayugas and the Cherokees, who lived almost a thousand miles further toward the south and were then in open warfare with the English who had settled in Virginia. But no one seemed able to tell him just exactly what had happened.



He was delighted therefore when he heard that I had returned and wrote me that he intended to visit Nieuw Amsterdam within a fortnight and hoped to see me. Meanwhile, after the years of comparative freedom, I had grown so accustomed to being my own master that I could no longer stand the restrictions imposed upon me by living in rented quarters. And as I had spent very little of My Lord Andries' money during the last two years (what I had with me when I met with my accident, Father Ambrosius had carefully packed in an old cassock of his and had put it underneath my pillow on the stretcher when he saved me from the massacre), I decided to invest a few hundred guilders in a little house of my own.

I bought a small piece of land from the bowery which stood in the name of Wolfaert Gerritszoon. I got the land very cheap because it overlooked quite a large swamp. But this swamp, which for the greater part of each year was very full of water, gave me the illusion of being near a lake. I found two Indians on Staten Island who said they could build me a wooden house such as were customary among the tribes of the Five Nations, and they proved to be excellent workmen and in less than a month's time my own house was ready for occupancy.

Bernardo's Choice

As soon as it had been finished, I sent word to Bernardo asking him to come and join me, but he favored me with a rather cryptic reply. It was a small piece of parchment with a rough drawing of an Indian on it, an Indian who bore a slight outer resemblance to Bernardo himself, and underneath it the cryptic words: "The Ten Lost Tribes have been joined by one more."

I therefore gave up hope of seeing him until I should be able to travel north once more and meanwhile waited for Captain de Vries who had been delayed by some trouble that had recently occurred in the settlement of Rensselaerwijk....



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J.S.1992

