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Drawing [parable]

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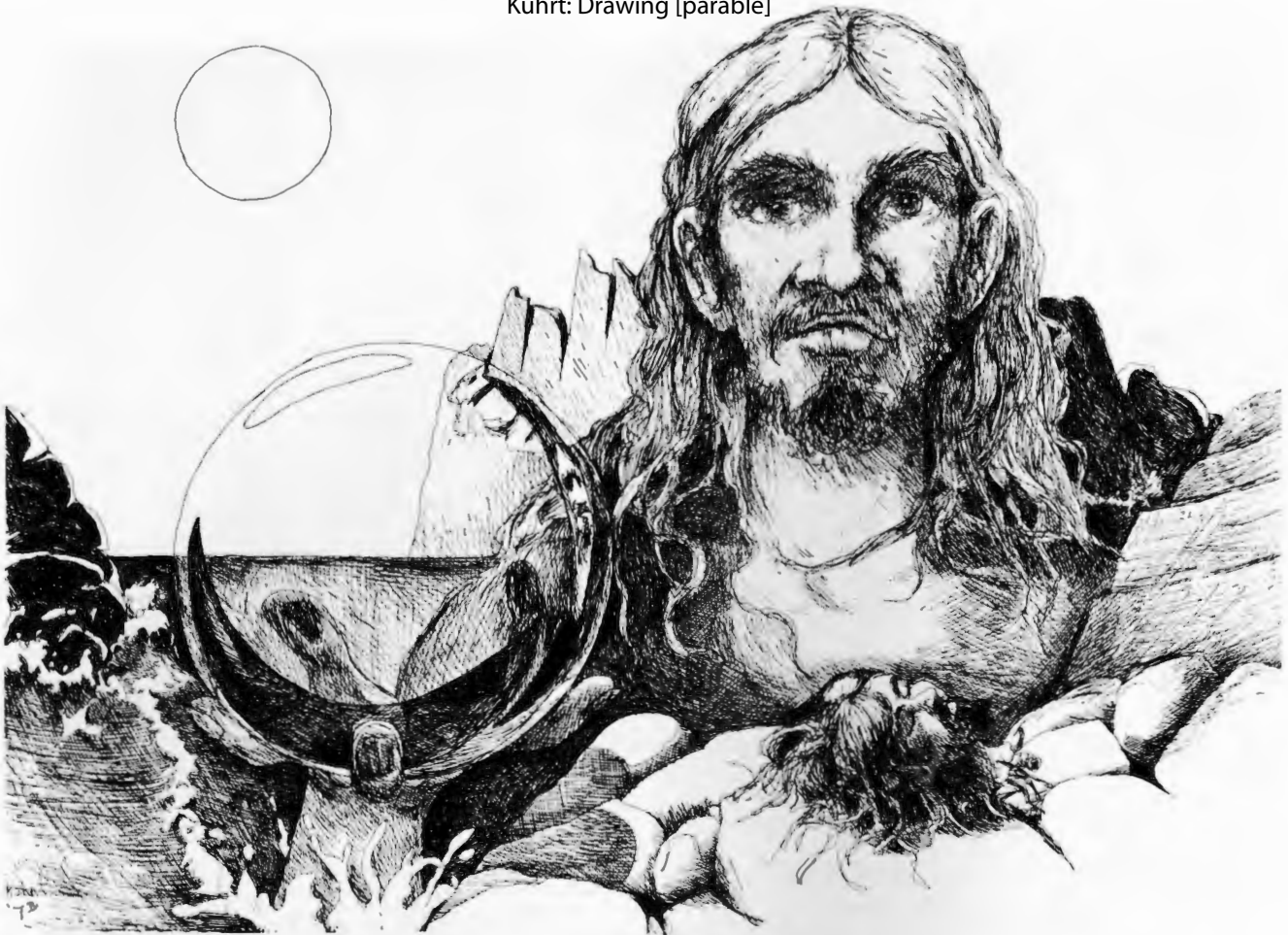
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Parable #2

It is currently believed that puppeteers manage their creations with the help of strings and a wooden frame constructed in the form of a double cross. The vast majority of our villagers hold that the wooden frame is not only necessary and expedient but also all the puppeteer really has to offer. They ignore the show and concentrate on trying to catch a glimpse of it. To behold even a single splinter of the wooden frame is thought to be a blessing, but no one has as of yet been so blessed.

Of course, no attention is paid to the strings. The puppeteer makes no attempt to hide them, he goes out of his way to purchase string of a color which he is assured will clash with his familiar backdrop, and he has now even introduced stage lights which complement the color of his strings in such a striking manner as to seemingly bring them right out into the audience, yet the villagers are not interested. As it has always been with the puppets (or does my memory fail me?), so it is now with the strings. No matter how complicated the drama, it makes no one curious; no matter how simple the acts sometimes are, they reach no one. The villagers seem responsive enough, with the way they crowd close to the stage in an apparent attempt to crush one and all and yet still manage to stare intently stageward as if oblivious to their own pushings and shovings. Laughter even breaks out. But the crowding is the result of the villagers' common attempt to get close enough to the stage to be able to look straight up and see the frame without being frustrated by the upper curtain, and their laughter is in response to the hurriedly choked cries of joy that echo down the streets when someone realizes an instant too late that he is mistaken if he believes he has seen the puppeteer's wooden frame. The villagers' laughter is cruel but they do not turn toward their victim. They only look all the more intently and with an added savage glee for a glimpse of the frame. It is rare, but once in a great while someone will leap onto his comrades in an attempt to rip down the curtain and expose the object of all their desires. But he is doing no one a favor, the puppeteer is always prepared. By the time any curtain is ever ripped down, the gaudy strings lie in a heap on stage, along with the puppets. Should the curtain still be ripped down (and this is extremely rare), true, the puppeteer is exposed, but where is his wooden frame? The show is in any case at an end. The only further thing the puppeteer has to offer the villagers is a most exemplary demonstration of how to fold up a puppet stage. The efficient, practiced manner in which he goes about this reduces his offender to such a guilt-ridden state that he is unable to function, he falls to his knees.

Although the villagers are not stupid, their demeanors at this moment suggest that they are. Their faces are slack and their gazes vacant. The scene of the puppet master striking his stage is like a hand which, waved in front of their eyes, they don't see. As they turn blankly toward him the offender collapses completely. They fall on him—but whether in revenge or because he presents the softest landing place, it is impossible to say.