

TRIALS

By the time that I reached the city, I assumed that things would be vastly different for me than it had been for Tom and Danny. I couldn't afford to land blind like them. The city was all about a basic uncertainty. But I needed to have some kind of edge.

While I sat at home, I tried to plot out my story. I felt as if I was packing my bags for a long journey. I would have to focus my studies so that I could apply my knowledge to a career for myself. That sounded way too official for what I was doing now. I didn't know how to get off the ground. For the time being, I believed that my life wasn't about what I was doing, but how I felt about it. I thought that my feelings revealed a deeper understanding of how I related to the world in general.

Danny had taught me so much about myself. He had said that it was all right to give credibility to my own emotions. I was afraid that I was doing something wrong by not listening to the teachings of my parents. But he had been making his own way all along. It gave me courage to be myself.

I knew that I would be in for many great challenges through my life. And these trials would often make me feel that I was at the end of my rope. I recognized that I could battle against any kind of problem.

I was just afraid that I was becoming self-centered. My mother fought me for showing any concern about my own situation. She was so strict in this regard. Danny gave me permission to ignore her advice. It hadn't worked for him. And it wasn't working for me.

Although my mother showed me concern, she believed that my illness was due to my own carelessness. She made every effort to correct my mistakes. I already felt insecure enough. I didn't need to feel more embarrassed.

I started to think that my body was the source of all my evil. I had always resisted this belief. But it was so much part of my religious teaching. The imperfections of the physical body anticipated the blessings of transfiguration. My illness was only the first step in that process. What would my future trials be like?

It felt wrong to consider myself to be besieged. But enemies did abound. And they threatened my well-being. And my biggest enemy was within. I was easily succumbing to my mother's counsel. I did not want this.

I had started with quite a clear intent. Now, I felt as if I was unpacking my bags. The train was leaving without me. How could I ever make it back to where I had been? I was looking back at my present from some future moment. Why had I let my mother's attitude bother me? Had she really stopped me dead in my tracks?

Here I was not doing a thing about what had happened. My imaginary future was fading from view. Was my present equally in jeopardy? My sickness would quickly relapse, and I would be prostrate in my bed. My mother had pointed out my weakness. And I could feel all my success unravel. I was going to have to work quickly. I was turning into a mass of affection without the hope of being independent. I had been working to make myself strong. Now, I looked helpless.

Those who focused on our supposed self-centeredness did little to break that grip. They only made us feel more dependent on their advice. There was little that we could do on our own.

My mother wasn't making me more self-confident. She only reinforced my reliance on her. But it wasn't as if she was going to oblige. She would retreat to her room and just let me be.

I was hardly ready for the end of childhood. I wanted to keep living in a world where my imagination was my most powerful friend. I felt as if my dreams could still come true. And my nightmares were always just around the corner waiting to pounce on me. My sickness had demonstrated the limits of make-believe. Try as I might, I couldn't wish my illness away. My imagination could offer little to reduce the terrible effects of the disease. I had been fortunate. With the passing effects, I returned to my former life. So much was automatic. But I couldn't go back to being the way that I was. All my symptoms combined were much worse than any bad dream that I could conjure up.

I had a number of years left in school. It would be quite a while before I would have to face the world of work. For the time being, I had enough to think about. School was pretty serious stuff. It really was like a job. And I toed the line. No one ever had any complaints. When so many kids just wanted to quit and go to work, the teachers truly enjoyed someone who cared about her studies. I applied myself without any reserve. That guaranteed my success. I wasn't being asked to build bridges. So I was able to accept every task assigned to me.

Some of the teachers assumed that I would follow in their footsteps. I hardly viewed myself as part of a religious order. But I would make my way where I was needed. I didn't have that commitment to constant prayer. That was something to worry about when I was older. That didn't mean that I was absolved of my constant battle with sin. I was reminded more than ever that sin was the clear result of our overindulgence in any of the delights of this earth.

It was a pretty big burden for a child to have to consider all the winding passages of hell. But that was the challenge placed on me. Even after my dark journey, the fear remained. Could anything that was to follow duplicate what had already befallen me? I felt that I had been endowed with a special kind of seeing. But if I dwelled on my so-called gift, it would only threaten what little remained of joy in my life. Childhood meant that I didn't have to worry about it. Death was no longer just around the corner. And I could retreat into a world of games and tomfoolery. Who was going to mess with my fun?

Adults hardly had the luxury. The world went on even if they were sick. Children always had that out. Nevertheless, it was more than tragic when a grave illness threatened a poor little thing. I had seemed like such a fierce warrior when I battled the disease. But now I was just a frail girl with not a lot on my side.

The wonders of childhood proceeded from our helplessness. We were always in scrapes, but nothing seemed to affect us. The average adult would feel doomed. Kids pranced around and pretended that nothing was happening. At the same time, adults could brush off cuts and bruises. But a scratch would send a kid into a royal frenzy.

I could play with Bobby. Or I could go for long walks. I had things to get done at home. But I wasn't expected to be always busy. I loved this freedom. I didn't want to give it up.

I had played the adult for a while. And my Church continued to put me through these massive tests of my faith. Otherwise, I had few major worries. So I did what I could to remain a child. I wasn't playing with toys. But I enjoyed hiding from everyone. Childhood offered me that luxury. I could appear when I liked, and people would dismiss my straying as due to my

youth.

I stored up knowledge from my experiences. It served to inoculate me against any serious threats. All the while the hobgoblins circled me. There was no way to dispel completely this mischief. If my mother lost patience with me, I could just slip back into childhood, and I would be off the hook. Although many times my guilt got the best of me. That was also part of my childhood.

I never saw myself as some kind of missionary out to save others. I just wanted to give back a little more than I took from the world. I had no idea where I would get the inspiration that I required. I needed more than a sign. There were signs all around me and they were all so contradictory. I needed clearer guidance.

I didn't consider myself as uniquely chosen. I hadn't been anointed from above. I wasn't in line for an order of high priestesses. There wasn't a reward from heaven awaiting me for my accomplishments. My just desserts weren't about to rain down on me.

If I hid in the shadows and tended to my humility, a random lightning bolt might finally graze me and reveal my proper course. I hoped for a more auspicious visitation. But even the most deserving saints had entered into fierce bargaining sessions just to achieve their eventual recognition. So I had to take all that I could get.

I didn't want to sound unappreciative of my blessings. It was just difficult to unravel the opposing threads of creation and finally discover my place in the unfolding mystery. If I wasn't going to be granted spiritual enlightenment, I would have to steel my own resolve. This was entirely consistent with my nature. I only wanted to know what I was supposed to do. I had no special talents that stood out. I loved music, but I couldn't play an instrument; I couldn't get my hands to work together. I was a good cook. I was a passable seamstress. I applied myself to my school work. Something would eventually be obvious for me. I had to wait it out.

I knew that I couldn't take the same path as my mother. This fact was something that had become even more obvious over the years. If I had been trained to repeat her struggle, my future plans would have seemed much more evident. That alone wasn't a reason for me to abandon my search.

I worked with my younger siblings. I felt that I had a real skill at communicating. They would love the games that I made up. They cherished my imagination. But I wasn't ready to have my own children. I didn't want to settle down. There was nothing settled about my life. Telling myself that I was doing fine wasn't going to change how I really felt. I knew that I had to satisfy my wanderlust. There wasn't a lovely little house in a quiet neighborhood waiting for me to call home. I didn't see myself doing great things. I wanted to explore more.

When I saw Danny and Tom leave for good, it finally convinced me that the only reality existed away from here. As long as I stayed, I would maintain this rift within myself between my thoughts and the world around me. I would constantly opt for my imagination. That would only make me more paralyzed. If not for the initiative of Tom and Danny, I probably would have let my dreams get the better of me.

I never saw myself on the verge of greatness. But I was a witness to something entirely monumental. It wasn't enough to know that there was this magnificence in a far away place. I needed to get there and experience it for myself.

My reality would begin the day that my suitcase was packed and I hopped on board that

train to the city. Until that moment, I would be saving myself for that grand event. In my mind, I could hear the crowds yelling. It was almost as if I was at a parade. As I moved closer, I understood what the excitement was about. I was joining the new world and making use of that energy that drove the powerful engines.

I tried to edge my way to the front. But I was being held back by my present. In my attempt, I looked silly. There was little that I could count on to make life more vibrant. I was the spectator who was trying to hold herself up. If I couldn't move along, I would get lost in the crowd, and all my dreams would vanish in thin air.

With Tom and Danny leaving, I recognized that this was a serious time for a change. I did what I could to sort out what was happening. But that was not enough. From my present perspective, I couldn't attain the needed insight. I was too immersed in what was going on around me. I had to separate myself more definitively from this world. Time offered us a vantage point to help us escape any dilemma. Lying on the bed in my upstairs room, I worked to get the necessary distance from the action. I was still too close. If I could only add years to my age, I could gain the experience to throw off the present. What would it be like to look back at my life and see it all with a more mature eye. It tried to steady myself in this task.

Now, I wanted everything to mean so much more than it did. I believed that the least little conflict was a matter of life or death. I thought that I was battling for my future. If I gave in, I would lose my head start. I had made an effort not to involve myself in all the silliness surrounding me. But that didn't stop me from finding my own frivolities and getting spun around in their currents. I worked to avoid squabbles with my brothers and sisters. I found my own way. That worked. But it wouldn't take much to tick me off.

It wasn't like me to go up to the room and sulk. Sometimes, there was no choice but to retreat. I'd find the right moment and just sneak away. While I was on my own, I did what I could to project myself to another time and place.

I thought about my abilities. I was good at keeping away all the nasty demons who were out to get me. But I couldn't survive by just reacting. The path to my future was based on a total break from all these encumbrances.

What did an adult point of view offer to aid in effecting my own plans? I attempted to peer into the future. My illness had been such a dramatic event for the present. It reminded me of a more profound rift in my self. I would confront that crisis with a calmer demeanor. My intent did not seem enough to show me what was my purpose. In the future, I would have a job. And I would be resting up from a long day. I wouldn't be involved in deep philosophy about my existence. That was only a distraction.

I couldn't let go of my worried. I really believed that I was constructing a world from scratch. Everything depended on my concentration. My sickness had shaken me. I was doing what I could to restore my confidence. I envied a time when I could sit on my own easy chair and reflect on my life. But that seemed to be an idle dream. I couldn't figure out how to make it to the next step.

The future was so often our excuse. We could put off a present urgency until it really threatened our well being. Since I was so disenchanting with my present, I was more than willing to live in a remote world. There, all my troubles would be eliminated. I could allow my boldness to rule my days. I wouldn't have to take orders from older sisters. It would be great!

I did what I could to work out the details of a time to come. The more that I tried, the more I became committed to my own way. But there were millions of factors that could change. My job could be terrible. My friends could betray me. I would be worn down by all the tension of each day. I would refuse to give out. I would become victorious in my quest.

My dreams made me immune from the world around me. I didn't want to view this as a weakness. I did what I could to compensate for all the distraction. I just felt as if I was in the midst of something truly incredible. It felt so liberating to think about the wondrous times that were to come. Sure this revelation was personal, but I wanted to share it with the world. For now, I needed to maintain my isolation. I threw myself into the tasks at hand. I did extra schoolwork. I was industrious at home. No one would know what I was really thinking.

As I became overwhelmed by my own experience, I felt somewhat out of touch with the world. I learned so much from what had happened to me. So I made sure that I wouldn't let myself get distracted by strain that had been placed on me. My illness had struck deep inside, and I did what I could to bounce back from the experience. I needed to harden my character against such blows. I realized how far I had come. Things that previously drove me to tears seemed routine. I still lived within myself. In many ways, I was cut off from the world. For a while, I wondered if I had become totally immune to pain. Since I didn't want to become overcome by what had been occurring to me, I needed to put it out of my mind. There were still incidents in my life that I would fret over as if they had the potential to knock me down for good. At the same time, there was so much that just slipped on past me. It would take a great deal for me to take notice. I feared that I would lack any concern for others' pain.

It may have been an overreaction, but I would wrap myself in sentimentality. I would get concerned with the least little thing. A new story or a movie might have that strange attraction for me. At the same time, I'd hear about a local tragedy, and it wouldn't phase me one bit. I didn't want to believe that I had become as cold as ice. I simply couldn't afford to let myself become helpless.

I found that I was dying in my imagination. The ripple effects of the smallest trifle became turned into a tidal wave. And I would get bowled over in the process. I'd pick myself ready for more. But I would have to double check if I had really been cut in two. Experience like this would strike the fear of the lord in me. I had to wonder what it was going to take to really devastate me.

Each new disaster would make me feel that I was becoming more callous. I didn't treat any of this as entertainment. But I would sometimes maintain this healthy distance. But that often meant that I was completely cut off from what was going on. It would almost take a hammer to revive me.

At such moments, I would have to rely on my faith to see me through. I felt as blind as a bat. All my reference points seemed blurred. It was so easy to lose course. I would pretend that I was aware of what was happening to me. Was I really all there? What would it really take to bring me to life?

I didn't want to think of myself as some kind of zombie. I was aware of my surroundings. I needed to tune out as much as I could just to remain sane. People must have seemed a little scared when they observed me walking through fire unscathed by the flames. What would it take to reach me in my somnambulant state. I was almost sleepwalking through my life. If I could

just keep it going, I wouldn't be affected by the weather or any of the tedium of remaining in this hapless community.

I hated to sound so arrogant. That wasn't my intention. I wanted to give of myself. My resistance was a factor of my youth. If I let myself get too involved, I would get dragged down. Then I could never escape. When I had a little more maturity, I could let myself be more open to the plight of others.

I consoled myself with the fact that I had assumed such incredible challenges. I hadn't shirked. I came through with flying colors. My fortitude was due to a personal courage. I calculated the risks. And I learned how to counteract the ill effects.

There were times when I almost fancied myself as some kind of actress. I was able to play the role. I could get all the right emotions to please everyone else. They believed my act. And it allowed me to fake my way through the worst situations. But this was hardly my style. Helen may have been better at being the charmer. I wanted people to be impressed by my honesty.

When I was sick, others were sympathetic with my condition. And my mother suffered along with me. But no one else felt the intense emotions that I did. And no one else felt pain at the same moment that I did. I didn't want to think that the most involving experiences of our lives left us isolated from others. How could I communicate the full character of what had happened to me? There were things that I could barely explain.

I wondered if my altered states of consciousness brought me closer to people. I imagined that I could somehow tunnel my way into their minds. Thus, I could achieve immediate understanding. Was I really taken by such nonsense? Maybe! If I failed in such an endeavor, then I really was cut off from the world.

I was immersed in this conflict to get to know the world better. How much of myself would I need to sacrifice in that task? I was being held back by my own reticence. I couldn't suffer any more than I had. What more would I have to do to let people in?

So many people who lived here let their frustration eat away at their sanity. Misery always loved company. They were looking for victims to drag down with them. I didn't want to get caught up in the craziness. It would be a lot worse than catching an infectious disease. After a while, I wouldn't be able to recognize what was me and what was the invading germ. I had been through such personal disarray. I couldn't take any more of it.

People would act extra friendly just to worm their way in. Once they had succeeded all their worst qualities would come out. They would try to trip me up with their petty jealousies. There weren't enough hours in the day for these quibbles. I'd rather read a book, and learn about characters who remained at arm's length. I had enough curious ones living under this roof. I didn't need any more busy-bodies.

I had argued myself right back into the same isolation. I wanted to believe that my challenges had qualified me in a special way to deal with others. It was becoming harder and harder to explain just what was occurring with me.

When we took trips away, it seemed as if things were truly different. Everyone seemed more alive. But in the big cities, I had heard about armies of the unemployed. They had no land to work. There was no place to apply their hardworking nature. They drifted from street to street in the desperate hope that something would open up. This was hardly the answer for me.

I had thought about my future for too long. It wasn't going to change overnight. And I

didn't have to worry about it. Things were right. But I had places that I could go which would offer me temporary refuge. I needed to keep my wits about me. It would be so easy to give up.

I had tried to pierce that veil that separated me from the rest of the world. It only became thicker. I was left to my own devices. If other people weren't going to give me the comfort that I sought, I would have to seek a deeper harmony in the world. This would encourage me to carry on.

There were parts of this farm that would never yield to cultivation. John could give his heart up to the effort to tame one of these plots. But he wasn't that deluded. He knew how to trust his instincts. I needed to do the same. I didn't want to be mean. But I could only share so much. For the rest, I would have to hold my breath. Now and then, I would inhale slightly. I wasn't cheating. I only wanted to survive.

My knowledge had helped me reinforce my own beliefs. But I couldn't use it to change others. If they were stubborn, so be it. I only hoped that I wasn't acting in the same way. There was so much world that was still there for me to see.

My sister was seldom so accommodating. Liz chided me, "You don't know how to live. You have to come out of your shell."

I had plans for my future. I didn't intend to hang around on the farm for the rest of my life. If I needed to separate myself from the fray so be it.

"I'm trying!" I didn't want to get her angry so I pretended to play along.

"You're like a turtle sneaking back into its shell."

She wasn't giving me much opportunity to answer back. Sure, my mother would challenge me. But she never pried. Liz was interrogating me. I don't know what made her think that she had the right.

When I was sick, I always had this feeling that Liz thought it was my punishment for not following her lead. If she had been down by the waters with us, she would have constantly warned me of the dangers. She wanted me to live, but she wouldn't allow me the opportunity to make my own mistakes. Mother was rigid, but, at the end of the day, she knew that we had our own lives. Liz was hardly that understanding.

"You need to meet people. You need to give of yourself."

The community was so small that we already knew everyone. I wasn't going to let them get involved in my business. That was how it was. I had learned this skill from my father. But Liz would have none of that. She was nothing but a cheap gossip, but she wanted to maintain this air of moral superiority. I had enough of a fight just to get by. Her interference really threw a wrench in things.

If I had any doubts about my plans to go to the city, Liz confirmed for me what I needed to do. She really wasn't helping me better myself. She just wanted to cut me down to nothing. If this had been an isolated conversation, I might have ignored her. But she wouldn't let me off the hook. She did the same thing to all of us. I was the most resistant. Most of the time, I just ignored her. Helen might engage her. Or she would even pretend to listen. I refused to do that. This was my test. I needed to assert myself even if that meant simply staying silent and walking away.

Liz tried not to let me get away. She wouldn't stop her rant. She would go on and on in the hopes that I would finally yield. I had no intention of letting down my guard. But she got

under my skin. I'd go upstairs to the bedroom and try to shake it off. It was deep inside. It fed any sense of depression that I might be feeling at that time. Liz knew that she had that power. she took delight about being a meddling older sister.

Upstairs, I would find the calm that I craved. I'd build up the wall a little higher. Liz was only motivating me to be myself. I was going to do what I needed anyway. She could scream until she was blue in the face. It was only making her feel more frustrated.

There were times when it seemed that my father wanted to tell her to simmer down. He would hear her go off. And he'd give me a sympathetic look. He realized that if he made a fuss, Liz would go running to my mother. That was all that she needed. My mother probably would tell her to moderate herself. But just that fact that she had said something to Liz made the poor girl think that she had added justification. Everyone knew that there was a problem. But they didn't want to throw gasoline on the fire. So they let her burn out.

The subsequent wait was often interminable. Liz knew how to cut a person's insides. I suffered one of her blows. Her comments would eat away from the inside. When I was younger, I really believed that she had some kind of authority that she derived from my parents. I thought that was how things worked. Older siblings had more rights, and they could use them against their younger brothers and sisters. She might have succeeded in her strategy, but there was nothing consistent in her advice. It became clear that she was saying things only to enhance her own accomplishments. I didn't want my life measured against hers. There was already enough obscurity.

If I saw Liz sitting downstairs, I would head upstairs. I didn't want to grant her the least opportunity to mess with me. As I hit the stairs, she would try to pull me back. I would claim that I had homework. Or I would hold up a book that I was reading. I just needed an excuse to go on my way. She would get wise to what I was doing. And she would save up her snide remarks. but I made sure that she wasn't going to follow me. That was that.

I envisioned myself alone in my apartment. Liz's words would continue to haunt me. She would put this strange aura over the farm. It was there for all us. But she made a stronger claim for herself. There were times that she tried to challenge John. He would hear none of her nonsense. He was actually holding things together. He didn't need some vague speculation to get in his way. If she truly had something to offer, then her actions could do the talking for her. John wasn't the sort to blab on. Even though he seemed very reserved, he liked to talk about serious things. Despite her own beliefs, Liz was only an impediment.

Liz tried her best to assume the role of head of the household. My father was absent enough, that she saw an opening. And she assumed my mother's age had caused her to lose patience with the younger children. Meg was hardly naive to her daughter's doings. In fact, Liz did her best to make it appear that she had our mother's blessings. And Meg did let Liz take up the slack. But my mother made me know that Liz was speaking for herself and could be ignored. She didn't want a spat to ensue. And I did my best to hold my tongue.

Ensnared in her room, my mother has literally withdrawn from the world. She still let her rule be known. Without her love, one felt like an exile in the house. I understood her severity, and I did my best not to become like her. I knew what an insult it would be to give in to my worst excesses. I could be just as short with the youngest. But I did my best to put on a cheery exterior.

Liz didn't hide the fact that she was bossy. And she thought that was enough to hold a household together. Instead of motivating us to do better, she just made us feel worse. She really thought that would serve to make us better people. As much as I tried to tolerate my mother, Liz was just impossible. She reminded me more than ever why I wanted to leave. She left this nasty feeling everywhere.

Liz was my sister, and I felt that I owed her sisterly devotion. She had done a great deal to keep things working. But there was something so insipid about her attitude that made it impossible to give her any credit. If there was one thing that was truly driving me away, it was her. She made such a fuss about things that I didn't care about. I knew that I couldn't help assume some of her worst traits. But I fought this urge. Like a Victorian matron, she imagined marrying us off. So she did everything that she could to invade our privacy. Fortunately, she had no grasp who I really was. We shared the same parents, but she wanted to stifle the only romance that remained. She was practical to a t. And she had little imagination. Worst of all, she thought that she could predict everything that we were going to do next. My mother avoided being so domineering. Perhaps, she thought that Liz was doing the work for her.

I envisioned my life so far away from the farm that no one could influence my decisions. I would always have my family. And they were a deep part of who I was. But I could allow them to try to manipulate me.

As the car drove Tom and Danny away, I watched a squirrel block the car's path. They remained in a prolonged stalemate until the squirrel realized that he was in peril. He still hesitated just a moment too long before he was able to scamper out of the way. An urgency had impressed itself upon him in a way that it never had before. His reflexes finally took over, and he did what he did best. His leap was stupendous. It showed his inner strength that he imprinted on the world. I locked in the image of him flying through the air.

Later in the day, I watched a flock of birds circle over us. They held in formation until the structure broke apart. They each went their own way. And the pattern was more complex and harder to appreciate. This reflected the myriad of forces that affected the universe. Through it all, they retained a common understanding, and they all returned to their previous formation.

Myth focused this plethora of natural signs. I needed to comprehend the hidden meanings. Our human limitations were projected upon these creatures who roamed the sky. They gestured for a fate greater than their destined flight. In this, they rivaled their makers. But like the high-flying Icarus, they always tempted too much, and they were rudely brought down to earth.

This story encouraged us to push out into the stratosphere. But the attempt was always ill-fated. The storyteller was the seer. He warned the listener. But he also piqued their curiosity. And nothing would satisfy except for a heady journey that was proposed by the original tale. It spoke its mysteries in the flesh.

Our predecessors understood this wisdom all too well. They gave into their desires without constraint. They thought that they could bring to life the truths that reverberated in their bones. The body's passions echoed these primal myths. Behind the myths were the energies of the universe that could be unleashed with the right chemistry. These peoples had mapped out all the hideaways long before the Europeans ventured this far up river.

I was learning the ways of the ghosts that spoke in the storms. I had become infected

with that very knowledge. It was so contrary to all the moral lessons. It inspired us feed our appetites and indulge the senses. I was afraid to give in to these pleasures.

The saint predicated her existence on denial. But she found a way to provoke equally intense feelings within her body. Thus, she eliminated any sense of frustration. She was able to affect the very same extreme responses that were a result of an awakening of pleasure.

Here, I sensed a calling. I attempted to discover how I could moderate these feelings. My own sympathies for the weak and downtrodden were my form of identification with the same spontaneity that had moved the ancients.

I was getting beyond the constraints of my upbringing. No wonder, I couldn't wait to be set free. The end of my illness reminded what really fascinated me in the world. I learned by observing. And that gave me a sense of well-being.

In each living creature, the vitality spoke of a symphonic interplay that reflected a deeper consonance in the universe. Even decay and destruction were part of the rich melodies. I watched a crow pick apart a dead squirrel. I fidgeted due to my sense of discomfort. I tried to look, but it was too grotesque.

The ancients grounded their ritual in the profound contradictions of nature. Rebirth originated in death. That really gave me the creeps. I could make sense of the concept. But the actual experience was a little frightening. Myth did its best to purify the elements that contributed to this representation.

I had tried to deal with my sickness as if it was a manifestation of a mythic encounter. But all the symptoms were too intense to moderate by my ideas. This overwhelmed any mythic intent.

If only modern medicine had been able to speed my recovery. But the doctor could only watch as the body did most of the work. It didn't make me question science. I simply had to accommodate myself to its methods. Over time, new advances might solve the great ailments of the ages. But I had to be content with a more pedestrian solution. I had neither the wonders of science or the feats of magic on my side. I needed a more practical manual for survival. I didn't want to sound bitter. Danny proved to me that I wasn't totally alone. Tom and John were there to help. Helen was looking out for me. I only wished that my greatest trials could be faced collectively. I didn't want to think that I was walking alone as I took on the struggles of the universe.

My mother had berated me for my supposed self-centeredness. But no one else offered me the tools to get through my greatest challenges. I could use their suggestions. But no one else that I knew had attempted as much. I wasn't simply running away. I really wanted to escape the grip that these ideas had over my identity. Some of my relative did respond to that plaintive call of the wild. But they were heading smack dab into the mouth of the beast. I didn't want to go out like that. I wanted to be able to claim victory. I wasn't a prospector about to get the fever over fool's gold.

If there was a treasure to find, I needed to rework my map. This didn't mean that I was going to become like everyone else. Certainly, there would be a time when I would have to be more accommodating. This was not one of them. I had seen the great design of the universe. It had reverberated through me. But I had faced a familiar punishment for my knowledge. I was not the first who had yielded to this same myth. If I had to take another bite out of the apple, so

be it. I was ready to bite down hard. The prospector responded to the call for gold in the Yukon. The bitter wind echoed the new. I had no such clear message being sent my way.

I admitted that I had the efforts of my predecessors to base my search. I was walking in their footsteps. Going to the city was hardly as ominous as heading towards the Arctic. I didn't want to be disrespectful of those who truly braved incredible odds. My mother understood the gambler's code. That was why she had tried to be so assertive with me. She knew that once I had been bitten that I couldn't turn back. Surely, I was unable to do anything less.

My trial only fueled my imagination more. It was all that I had to go on. I didn't want to see myself as moving from place to place in the hopes of finding my Camelot. But if that was what it took, I was ready to fortify my luggage.

I was no great world traveler. I didn't see myself on the Pacific shores crying to the sea gods. But I could feel the pull westward. I felt unable to resist. Sure, I would try Montreal like the others. But that would only be the beginning. I had already felt the continent's potent vitality. I needed to follow it to the source. Even if I never went anywhere, there was a place within that vibrated with the great energy of time.

I could feel a summer cold coming on. If I rested up, I could knock it out before it overcame me. It was a lovely night. There was a slight dampness in the air. I wouldn't let the chill get to me. I would head to bed early. The next morning, I would feel fine. I needed to work with my body. It would carry me along the journey. I would need the fragile craft to take me to my destination.

I wished that I was more successful at expressing the absurd balance that moved the planets. Galileo had observed the fundamental sympathies that affected the universe. I lacked that technical eloquence. I could not even achieve the poetic inspiration to capture how these heavenly bodies affected the heart. I was doing my best to rest up and prepare for tomorrow's great exploits.