

THE PATHWAY OF LIFE

I took off my mitten to peek at the tuft of white hair cupped in my hand and feel its feathery softness beside the hard metal of the gold ring.

I spoke to myself. "Hard cold"

This is what Walter would have muttered, if he had been standing beside me instead of lying buried in ground at the edge of a city. None of us can know where our journey will end or what place we will be left to sleep in. Our last resting place is more likely to be settled through convenience than poetry. But if Walter could have chosen a place, this might be it.

At Ragged Falls the ground is quiet. All of its secrets are buried under the freshly fallen white snow in stark contrast to the roaring of the river down below me. That is where I'm going; down the steep slope towards the main section of the falls, to say a prayer for my old friend. I want to give the river what I have been saving, to leave his hair and ring in the kind of place which reminds me of him.

At the brink of the falls I put my arm out over the rushing icy water and slowly open my hand to the updraft above the river's wake. It sweeps away his hair, swiftly blowing it up into the sky. I have to stand carefully to keep my balance. I close my hand on his ring and shut my eyes to remember him. Then I throw the ring hard and fast, so it flies far to its rightful place in the falls beneath me.

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The story of how I came to know an old prospector named Walter began far away from Ragged Falls on a hot August day with clear blue skies.

Walter was 78 years old and living in a tiny room inside a large, decrepit rooming house. His building was on the verge of collapse, held together with patch-work repairs and heart break. He had been living in that dump for 6 years

I had heard Walter was being evicted from the place. The landlord confirmed this was true. He said he liked Walter but had to do this. Then, to justify his reasoning, he took me down a dimly lit hallway to an apartment door. As it

opened I saw a mountain of goods piled high to the ceiling. The last remaining space in the room provided the faint hope for a sideways maneuver from the door's entrance to the mountain's edge. What lay beyond was chaos.

The landlord told me Walter had lived here until it was no longer possible, then moved into another smaller room in exchange for the promise he would clean out his old apartment so it could be rented. Two months had passed but nothing had changed. Walter was continuing to bring things home, and now his new and smaller room was also filling up.

I left the landlord in his office and went down another hallway to find Walter's new room. At his door I knocked and waited. There was no sound. I knocked again and called out his name, "Walter?" The door slowly cracked open. A slight, white haired man peered out at me. "Who are you and what do you want?"

I started to introduce myself, wanting to explain why I was at his door. Glancing above his head I could see one of the walls in his place with stuff stacked to the ceiling. Then the door slowly closed.

I went for a walk to think about this brief encounter. I was sensing his fear mixing with my own anxiety about being old and living in a place like this. I wondered what these two rooms filled to overflowing meant to this old man and why he had barricaded himself inside each of them in succession. My heart told me it might be important to surround yourself with objects if you felt alone in the world. The things we find and keep can provide us with comfort. Whether this lasts or fades or has to be retrieved again and again, is a deeper mystery. But when all of this is tossed aside, what we gather may have another very practical purpose. It can fill up empty space and protect us from strangers who might try to come through our door.

I remembered the stained sport coat Walter was wearing. It seemed important. So when I went back to visit three days later, I took a brown pin stripe suit with me. It was a peace offering, a gift to message my respect for the values of his age and generation. I suppose I was in a symbolic frame of mind at the time, wanting to send a message Walter would see rather than hear. Entering an isolated world

can be very difficult. Words have to be used carefully. Words can be misunderstood. I hoped the suit represented a simple way of showing him ... *I want to know you.*

The second visit was a better one. When the door opened I held up the brown suit between us and I spoke through it, telling him I had brought this present. Then I lowered it and smiled at him. The door opened wider. He reached out his hand to take the suit and smiled back with spontaneous pleasure, distracted from me towards what I was giving him.

“I saw this suit and I thought of you.” He looked at me in a way that was different from my first visit.

He breathed heavily. “Oh this is... very kind of you... thank you. What’s your name again?”

With those words our friendship began. I explained who I was, and why I had come with an offer to help solve his landlord problems. I told him about PARC, what it did and what it believed to be important. As I spoke I noticed Walter was looking at me decisively, listening.

I was looking at him with just as much intent. He was a small man with a slender, strikingly athletic build for someone of his advanced age. He was wearing a soiled white shirt and using tattered suspenders to hold up his trousers. Around his throat he had wrapped a wide red bandanna, tied in the style of an old bandit who has just pulled his mask down. His face was striking, with large, blue green eyes, a large arrowhead nose and enormous protruding ears. His hands were small and delicate, the skin translucent with age. I could feel his life spirit drawing me towards him.

After about 20 minutes Walter said. “Why don’t you come in.....this would be better than talking in the hall.”

I stepped through the doorway and he sat down on the edge of his over-crowded bed. I scanned his sleeping area. There was a big stack of brown paper bags piled at one end next to a collection of blankets in various colors, magazines,

books and newspapers. Six feet away from the bed, almost within touching distance was the room's south wall. Jutting out from this was a massive green metal file cabinet with drawers so packed they could not be closed. It was filled with more newspapers, magazines, and packages; supporting another pile of books, papers, boxed dishes, shoes and clothes that were threatening to touch the ceiling.

Further along the wall of this cell-like space was an arrangement of cardboard and plastic boxes, filled with plastic bags. They held cans of food, scraps of cloth, nails screws, and tools. Lying on top of all of this was an old axe and above that hanging from the ceiling, a kerosene lantern. For some reason there were thin sheets of cheap and broken plywood covering the floor of the room. I thought it odd until I saw cockroaches moving in and out from under it whenever I shifted my weight and disturbed the wood's arrangement.

I stood wedged into the space. The one window in the room looked as if it had never been opened. But Walter did not seem concerned with his claustrophobic home or its crowded and obvious discomforts. He simply looked at me with interest.

He looked at me steadily and spoke carefully. *"Can you get a truck to move my things?"* I said yes. Then he asked a second question as if it was very confidential and important. *"Is it a prospector's truck?"*

Sometimes we promise to solve problems without having any recourse or time to form a realistic judgment on how to proceed. We act on instinct, committing ourselves to outlandish schemes, trusting that fate, luck and awareness will take care of the details. This was one of those moments. I thought about a prospector's truck and what it would look like. It had to be an open pick-up truck. It had to be old, battered, and something I could get my hands on without too much trouble, ready for use when I needed it. Then I remembered my carpenter friend's red Toyota flat bed and its rust ridden sides.

“Yes, I can get a prospector’s truck. Why don’t we go over to PARC? We can have a cup of coffee and something to eat. We can talk about the truck when we get there.”

The next few weeks were busy ones. I focused on making a relationship with Walter and encouraging his trust in me. I noticed how his mood could change. He would be erratic, irritable and distracted on some days, and more relaxed and clear headed on other days. I soon discovered he was using the brown paper bags to help alleviate the misery of incontinence. So I got him some diapers and with gentle diplomacy persuaded him to try them. I noticed how this seemed make him look more comfortable. At this early stage I was visiting every day, encouraging him to come over to PARC with me, to meet the staff and members of the drop-in. I walked him over for the lunch service and helped him to get into the habit of using this. We ate together and talked. Soon other PARC members became curious about this old man, new to PARC. They dropped by our table to say hello and his apprehensive mood slowly began to change.

As the days passed and his visits to PARC increased, his natural ability as a story teller began to show itself. He had an opinion on everything and he loved discussion. He had an ongoing interest in reading the newspapers and commenting on the news of day or big political events, but the stories of his adventures were the most important part of our conversations together. I was struck by how Walter’s stories always seemed to end with some kind of special supernatural or spiritual discovery.

This was how he explained his residence in Toronto. Walter had come down to the City from his home in Ontario’s northern woods to get some medical care. He had taken the place because it was affordable and conveniently close to the local hospital where he could get surgery to help with his failing bladder. After this, he retreated back to the rooming house so he could complete his recovery. But his plan for a short-term stay in the city changed after his surgery. He delayed his return home after a visit from his guardian angels told him to do this. Walter believed in guardian angels and was very forthright about how they continued to advise and guide him. His guardian angels had convinced him to remain in the

rooming house, to keep an eye on things and watch over the safety of the place. Even more, his guardian angels promised to let him know when he would be free of this responsibility and could live elsewhere.

His life before coming to the City had been unusual. He had worked in the mines on and off, but only as long as he had to. Most of his life had been spent alone, prospecting in the bush. He had done this for over 40 years. Walter had made money and lost money. He was by nature a treasure seeker, but having looked for gold all his life he had also learned to notice and recover many other things along the way. He was interested in what could be found through close attention to the ground over which he walked. He shook his head as he recalled the young prospectors who had never been able to see anything other than the gold they were determined to find.

He mused. *“They missed so much because they never looked for anything else. They couldn’t see there are lots of other important and valuable things under their feet. They didn’t pay attention.”*

Then, as if to illustrate his point, he told me how make an edible porcupine stew (seasoned with spruce buds), and how to live safely in the woods without becoming a victim of the forest spirits that haunted them (listen for their voices in the wind). He said that to be a good prospector a man should hunt to live and live to hunt.

As Walter talked, the more of a contradiction he seemed to be. One part of him was the grand, old, competent frontier gentleman. But he also lived with great uncertainty, given to hoarding things and enduring the misery and isolation it brought into his life.

Meanwhile, the risk he would be evicted had not changed. I wondered if this might be the best way to get him out of the rooming house. Then I considered what might happen if he was pressured to leave his housing without his consent. I could see what had to be done. There would be no quick fixes to the situation he was caught up in. I had seen those before with people forcibly moved to institutional care and public guardianship. They lost their rights and in some

cases quickly lost their lives as they went through the trauma of this. I thought that I knew Walter well enough to believe this might happen to him.

He was living with serious risks at the end of life filled with risks. I had to ask myself what was better – living a life you owned or living a life you that you were forced to live by somebody else because it appeared safer? I had to be very careful now. I was making the commitment to find a way for Walter to sort out how to live more safely. But I had to do this before the risks he faced became overwhelming, or before it was too late for him to make decisions about how those changes would be made. So I told the landlord I was planning an intervention, was making progress and needed more time.

Walter had gradually come to depend on me. The promise of the prospector's truck had not been forgotten. It was arranged and waiting for the moment we would use it. In the meantime Walter was continuing to take his meals at PARC, getting out for social support and becoming stronger.

The end of summer was upon us when I arranged a date to borrow the little red truck; to begin moving some things from his living space and launch a clean-up of his old room. I learned that Walter had a rented storage locker just south of his rooming house. I proposed using this to help with the clean-up but I wanted to see it first. I suggested we take some things for storage and choose some other things for disposal. Walter did not want to let anything go but I was hoping he would gradually change his mind as we went forward. In fact I was hoping the real outcome of this work would eventually be his transition from the rooming house to a better place to live. Helping him release his hoarded things seemed to be a way of preparing Walter for letting go of the rooming house he believed he had to live in.

I made a short visit to the storage facility on my own, to confirm the kind of rental arrangements Walter had there and see what else I could discover about him. The manager was sympathetic. She knew Walter and was more than willing to talk with me about the extent of her business dealings with him, because she worried about him. She told me he was renting 4 storage lockers; two large ones and two smaller ones. In her words, he was a very dedicated customer, and yes,

had been continually increasing the scope of his rental space since his first contract was set up 6 years ago. She didn't think what was going on was right. He was old and should be using his money in other ways than this. She didn't really know what he was putting into his lockers and even if she did there was nothing she could do about it. I stood there in stunned silence.

A week later I arrived with the prospector's truck. Walter was in great spirits while I was tense with expectation. What was I going to see in all these storage lockers? How was I ever going to resolve this problem? I kept my thoughts to myself and concentrated on Walter's eagerness to take a drive in my borrowed prospector's truck.

I was struggling with the question of how to sort out what could and should be done. So I told Walter we needed to inspect the storage facility to plan the best possible pack up and relocation of his things. This became the working purpose of our day. I was the worried young man feeling older than my age. Walter was youthful and full of energy. Our check of the storage units was completed over the next couple of hours. But at the end of this everything had changed.

The first storage unit was filled top to bottom with old beds. The second locker had construction tools, floor tiles, paint, and scrap wood of various lengths and types. The third locker was filled with shoes for men, women and children, used clothes, tattered furniture, radios, televisions, a fitness workout treadmill, dolls, toys, games and magazines. The last unit was only partially filled and looked like Walter's original room, a mish mash of found odds and ends. This was the one he wanted to use. The others would remain untouched.

Walter unlocked and inspected each locker carefully as if he was looking for something he could not find. He explained this storage depot and what it was for. Everything he had found and brought here was to be transported back to his old mining home near Red Lake. The goods he had purchased or rescued from garbage disposal would be given out to the people living up there. They were poor and had little. He was saving everything for them because he knew they were in need. He was going to make their lives better.

Walter wasn't concerned that so many of his things were old, tattered and even broken. Repairs could be made to them when he got them back home. He knew everything would be appreciated and used. It was quite a vision. How this old man had managed to gather up and move all of these things was incredible but something else was pulling on me now. When I drove him back home I knew I was grappling with a problem that was much deeper than I had bargained for.

I knew I wasn't going to solve this hoarding problem with a tiny prospector's truck but I was beginning to understand more about how he lived. Within his collection of objects lay the story of what they represented, the people who would use them one day and the life he had lived. He was still out there prospecting, but with a purpose adapted to the circumstances he found himself in. He was holding on to what had been the principle direction of his life and true to his beliefs he was finding all kinds of valuable things in his travels. But he had not found the gold he was looking for. I thought to myself. *People are gold. Relationships are gold.* Then I decided to take him camping.

PARC had a fall tradition of providing a wilderness camp experience for up to 50 people at a place called Camp Kandalore. Our host camp had a long and storied history. It had been established as a canoe tripping camp back in the 1950s and was one of the first places to seriously train young people in the art of the canoe. On the back of its property there was an old log building with a priceless collection of canoe craft, the original Kanawa Canoe Museum. PARC discovered the camp when it was going through a period of hard times. Camp attendance was down. They had no money and we had no money, so we improvised. We traded our labor to the camp to help them renovate. In exchange they provided a camping experience for PARC members that turned out to be so powerful it created a shared tradition for both parties.

This was where I wanted to take Walter. I began to talk about it and show him pictures. It was coming up in a couple of weeks. It would be a big deal for him to leave the rooming house for any amount of time. He was still new to PARC and this too was a challenge. So I adjusted how we would get there. We would avoid the long, hardy bus ride and the first settling in night of camp. I would make a

special trip to take him up in the comfort of my car. We would visit and stay as long or as short as he liked. We would have the chance to walk in the woods and paddle a canoe together. It would be like returning home. He would see the forest again.

Walter was nervous about leaving his room and storage lockers untended but I could see he was being drawn towards this adventure. I noticed how his contact with other excited drop-in members was helping this along. Eventually he agreed; he wanted to go to camp, if I could drive him there as offered. I prepared his bags. Then I made sure everything at the camp would be set up to help him feel safe and welcome when he got there.

We arrived at the camp a couple of hours before its second day supper service. We had taken our time driving north; stopping for rest breaks, having a big lunch en route and taking time to reassure him that everything back in the City would remain just as he had left it. By the time we got to the camp his anxiety had faded and he was in great spirits. When we walked into the main lodge, a cheer was raised by other PARC members. They came rushing over to greet him. Walter was surrounded by smiles and hand shake greetings. He was beaming in the glow of all of this attention. It is a beautiful thing to be noticed and welcomed.

Walter loved the camp and it fell in love with him. We hiked alone together and with groups of other members. He was still very agile and he wanted to walk every trail. But sometimes the distances or the rough ground tired him. I offered him my arm if he became unsteady on his feet and he took it. The camp staff and camp group were fascinated by him. He was old, but strong, and he knew so much that he just naturally took on the role of camp guide. He named the trees he saw and told everyone what was useful or unique about them. He pointed out various plants and how they could be used for food or healing. And he told stories.

The most lasting memory of that first camp took place while we were out on the water in the canoe. He was still a skilled paddler so we took turns in the bow and stern. While we rested he talked and I listened. He described his chance meeting with Grey Owl, his grand encounters with the northern lights and snow shoeing in the winter woods. I was convinced that I was sitting with a man who had lived a special life, a life that should be honored with as much love as I could bring to him. I knew at that moment I was going to bring Walter home to meet my wife and children.

A week after we got back to the city I invited Walter to my home. He looked quite dashing. He was wearing a red bandanna around his throat, his fedora hat, and a suit and tie. I remember how gracious and gentle he was as he met and shook hands with my wife and son and daughter. He had three helpings of dinner and just as many rounds of dessert. Afterwards we went out to the front porch to linger for a while before I took him back to his place. I remember him there beside me. We didn't say anything. We just sat together, smelling the fall air and watching the tree and garden at the front of the house.

A couple of days later I asked Walter if he was ready to tackle his overcrowded rooms. I told him I could get a few of the men he had met at camp to help us out. I was going to rent a van to use with this crew. Many hands would make it easier to get his things out of the rooming house. He said he was ready.

On the morning of that day I wasn't really sure what would happen but I had a plan I hoped would work. I had hired a six man crew and told them we were going to be moving a lot of stuff out of the rooming house next door to PARC and into a storage space. And that it belonged to the old prospector who had shared the recent camp with them. I would pay an hourly rate if they agreed to keep one condition. They had to promise to make no comment about what they were moving or where it was going. They just had to do the work and trust that everything would work out as it was supposed to.

Our helper crew was directed to clear Walter's first room. Walter was free to watch over what was taking place. He was a bit anxious but I stayed by his side and helped him through this. Periodically I took him aside for a break, so we

could retrieve things from the room he was living in. We set these aside, so they were ready to be placed in the truck last. They would be the first things moved into the storage locker once we arrived there.

It took a full four hours to get a load together. Walter did surprisingly well. He was edgy but in good humor. The crew I had hired made the big difference. They liked Walter and he liked them. They were very respectful and they worked carefully and hard. As promised they kept their thoughts to themselves, except for the occasional eye rolling in my direction. When we finished I put the crew in a taxi and sent them down to the storage space. Walter climbed up into the van with me and we started south. I looked over at him. He looked very tired.

When we got to the storage facility we began the unloading process. This was harder, because the walk into the locker was much further than it was from his rooms to the truck. So we used hand carts. I set up a chair for Walter at the locker so he could watch what was coming in. We brought the things from his room in first and put them near the locker entrance door. Then I began to send selected items from the old room. I tried to pick what looked important and left the rest. We did this for an hour. Every 20 minutes I stopped the unloading and slipped back to the locker to see how Walter was holding up.

At the end of an hour Walter looked up at me with very tired eyes and asked,
“Are we finished yet?”

I said,

“Yes, we have just a few more things to come. You wait here for me and I will bring them in for you.”

I went back to truck. It was still more than half full of goods. I picked the best things I could find and loaded up the dolly truck to take it back to him. Then I closed and locked the truck’s back door. We were done. I paid the crew and explained Walter had moved what he wanted. We were now finished. Then everyone was thanked for their patience and their support and sent home.

I grabbed the last dolly load and wheeled it into the locker. Walter had fallen asleep in his chair outside the locker space. I let him sleep on for a few minutes and then I wheeled the dolly past him and into the locker to unload. The sound of my movements woke him up. I told him that we were finished, he had done a great job and now I could take him home. Walter gave me another tired smile as I unloaded the last of his goods and locked the door. As we walked back to the truck I wondered what would happen. I was holding my breath. I was gambling that he would not ask to look inside the truck to see if it was empty.

When we arrived at the truck I knew it was over. He wanted it to be over. He climbed into the truck without a word and I drove him home. He thanked me for my help and we said goodbye. I waved as I drove off. I was torn between turmoil and peace as I headed north to deliver the last of our load to a city dump station. I had to tell myself that I was doing what Walter wanted me to do and what had to be done before he could go forward to a happier place. But I also asked myself if I could do this in my own life? Could I hang on to only the best things and let everything else go?

We never said anything more about that day because we got busy doing other things. I was encouraging Walter to let me move him to a safer home. But this was difficult. He had lived in that old building for a long time and even though it was a dreadful place it felt too safe and familiar for him to let it go. We were talking and looking but it was taking time to get him ready to leave. Still we were doing other important work together. We cleaned up his room to make it a bit more livable. He also stopped paying his rent on his storage lockers. He gave me written permission to look after his affairs there. Now, communications on the rent owing and the future of the lockers was going through me. One month of arrears had turned into two, which turned into three. I knew that we were headed towards a notice that would say the lockers would be confiscated for unpaid rent and that this was coming soon. Walter knew it too but it did not concern him. He didn't want to talk about that place anymore. He was walking away from his storage locker dream and letting me help him do that.

Halloween arrived. I invited Walter over to have supper, to help give out candies to the children coming to the door. We sat together on the porch again and he put the treats in their bags. He had a comment for every costume. I remember he smiled a lot that night and I thought about how we all put on different disguises to make our way through life.

Then, as chance would have it, there was big trouble in his rooming house. In early January its heating system broke down. I was busy with work that kept me away from the building. Three very cold days had passed before I accidentally discovered what was going on there. When I found Walter lying ill in his bed I called an ambulance. Then I thought about how I could put his landlord permanently out of business. ***

The hospital told me Walter had pneumonia. When you are old pneumonia can kill you. But fortunately Walter was a tough old boy, and was able to bounce back from this crisis. As he recovered he told me his guardian angels had visited him and told him he must not go back to his old room. I nodded and smiled and said I agreed with them. His stay in the rooming house was finally over. It was time to move on.

When Walter was well enough we left the hospital and chose a small retirement home together. It provided him with a room and a meal service. It was a nice looking place, although it lacked the kind of characters appealing to his social interests. But he still had PARC for this. So he adjusted. He asked me to manage his financial affairs and I took discreet steps to change my relationship with him. I resigned as his worker and fully took on the role I had been really having with him – family.

We still had some years to go before our time together ended. He continued to gather or purchase objects of interest from time to time, but he was more selective now. Since I was looking after his money I could support him whenever he found something he was compelled to acquire. He liked to collect old kerosene lanterns. Whenever he picked these up he gave them to me so I could hang them from the ceiling in my office. He found old cross cut saws, which he insisted I store for him. He loved old books. One of them was called Pathway to Life,

published in 1888. It was filled with pictures and strange chapters like: *The Importance of Taking Aim or The Bravery That Confronts Steel and The Bullet*. Walter loved that book. One night he brought it with him to dinner. He knew my wife was a book binder and he wanted to arrange for her to repair and rebind it for him. She did a lovely job and Walter was delighted, but after he looked at it he handed it back to me and said, “*Keep it for me please.*”

Walter was 83 when he made his last trip to Camp Kandalore. He was still determined to walk its trails like we had done at every camp since the first one together. We made our last hike on the day before camp ended, walking arm in arm down the now familiar trail to the river and on to the back quarter of the camp where the cliffs lay. Walter relied on me to steady his balance all the time now. I am not sure he really noticed this because it was familiar and he was so happy to be there. I was happy too. But I had to stop more to rest. Supporting him was hard work. When we turned around to make our return trip to the lodge the afternoon was waning. The trip back was slow going because we were tiring. When we got back to the river, we headed up the slight incline to where the trail broke off in two directions. The right trail went back to the main lodge and supper. The left trail went up a steep hill through a series of switch backs leading to a look-out site. I stopped so we could both rest. We found a big log and sat down together. After a 10 minute break I helped Walter back up to his feet and started us on towards the main lodge trail.

Suddenly Walter pulled on my arm and stopped walking. He shouted at me.

“

No. I don't want to go to the lodge. I want to go to the top of the mountain.”

He pulled away from me and started up steep hill trail. I called after him “Walter, stop. It is too far and too hard a trail. We can't get up there and back before dark.”

He continued on, waving his arms back at me to show he didn't want to hear what I was saying. He shouted at me again. “

No, I am going up the mountain. I don't care what you do.”

I stood still watching him go. I waited, hoping he would stop. But he continued on, even though he was beginning to stagger with exhaustion as the trail ascent became more difficult. I waited another minute. I remember feeling the second hand of an invisible watch turning inside of me. It was winding me up tighter and tighter. I stopped breathing but he kept going on.

I called again... “Walter, please stop...!”

And then I ran after him, with great, leaping strides, until I got close enough to grab a hold on his arm. I pulled him to a halt, let go and wheeled in front of him.

“This is wrong Walter. I know you feel strong but I am tired...and this is not safe.....to try and climb this trail... alone.... We have to go back....!” My words sounded strangled.

Walter wobbled slightly in a great effort to restore his balance. Then, he hit me. His fist struck me in the chest, directly over my heart. I staggered back in shock. He staggered too. We stared at each other. I was struggling and Walter looked stunned. Neither one of us moved. We were holding our ground. I wasn't going to give way and neither was he. Nothing was said because nothing could be said. We were drifting, into an unbroken stillness and emptiness that had no form. There was nothing for us to hold on to, except each other, and the dead to right certainty we could never exchange or explain our places in the world.

A crow flew over, its call breaking the silence between us. We both looked up to watch its black form pass over. The sky was shifting. It seemed to be mocking and forcing us down into the softness of the earth for a relentless, few seconds.

As I lowered my eyes I saw Walter slowly beginning his turn around. He was moving elegantly, like an old dancer. He took a few steps down the hill and stopped, turning slightly to see what I would do. He was waiting for me to come

back to him. Then, he stretched out his left arm towards me and spoke softly, but with a voice that was resolute and firm.

"It can wait on another day. Come on."