

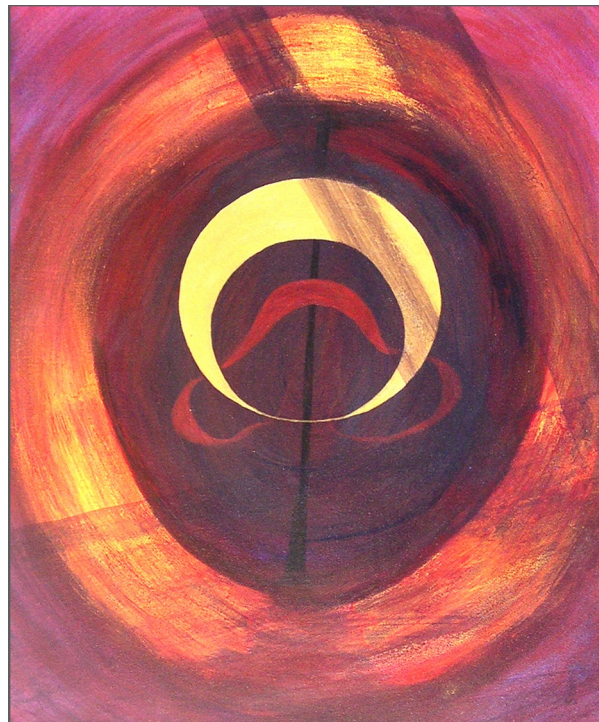
My Dear Child

An illustrated poem to be read aloud
by Stone Riley in 2014 ©
www.StoneRiley.com

My Dear Child,
You'll understand,
I cannot write to you as often as we both would wish.
Everything is so hard here. It's hot.
The Sun here is horrible this year, and food is running low.
It's hot.
We're glad you left, despite the loneliness here, really.
You see, the gardens have died now, they all died.
It's hot. The water's low.

.....

Our neighbors whom you know next door, whom you remember,
whom you think of with fondness I'm sure, are doing poorly still.
We had them over yesterday for tea.
They have nothing left to sell.
They ask about you. We reassure them.
Are you still well?



.....

Soldiers have been through here again recently, the brown ones.
They took some girls and boys away, I don't know why.
They say they'll feed them.
There was a lot of weeping. It's hard to stop.

Is the war over yet? We haven't heard.

We had a letter from you in the spring. Are you still well?

Do you have soldiers there? What kind? Are there many?
Are there bombs exploding?

.....



.....

Some days it's hard to rise from bed, with only us two here now.
It's easier to lie and think.
I think and think.

Do you remember the woods out behind the house? Of course you must.
But do you remember sometimes, just a little maybe sometimes,
walking out there once, the first time we did, you and me,
the first time we ever did, when you were very small I think?
You got stuck in the blueberry bushes! They were up above your knees!
You couldn't even step, tangled all around your feet like that,
and you fell down flat, you darling little thing,
face flat down into the soft earth, leafy soft, damp,
and I hauled you up by one little hand, like a god from a machine,
and you were like a mighty hero truly,
angry at that berry patch and wanting to press on through!
Me like the helmsman of Odysseus crying that we must turn back.
You are such a pretty brave child, my dearest.
You must be doing something good, I think.

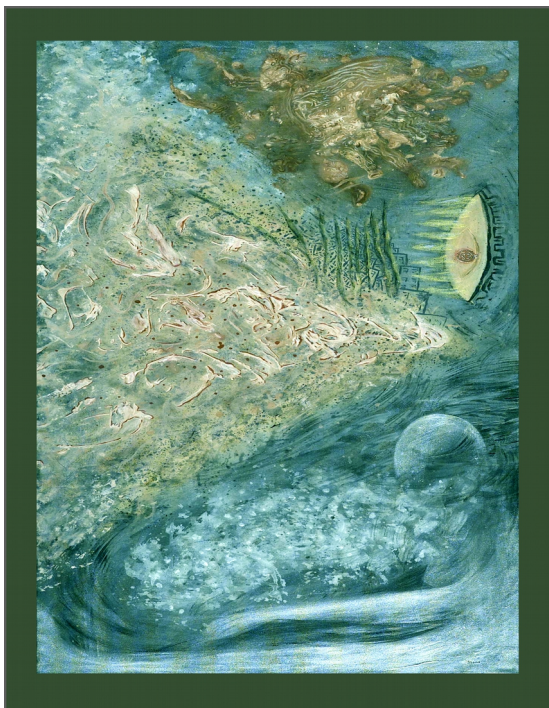
Are you well?



.....

Do you remember all the birds? There used to be so many birds.
The noise they made. I find them dead sometimes.
I found one dead last spring. Just after your letter came,
that very day, it gave me such a start. A pretty little thing,
a wren, brown. A wren.
Among the dry forest floor, dry litter sticks, and there it was.
I had to cry so loud: "No, this is not you!" I cried.
But in the woods. It was. There were ants on it.
That day was early spring you see, but dry and warm;
the little ants, the small ones,
they were running in and out the tiny nostrils of this little bird dead,
tiny head, stiff legs,
but it was still a body whole, its eyes wide wide, in my hand
as I picked it up and held it close to my eyes to see
and ants were running in and out and chasing around my fingers.
So I spoke your name of course and wept and spoke your name
more than anyone can count.
But you are well, my dear dear child, or not?

.....



.....

It is so easy nowadays to sleep,
to fly on the wings of dreams, into some other country.



But she woke me suddenly there in our bed, your mother,
waked me suddenly, shook my arm so hard
and gripped it in hard fingers so I turned back to her there,
she was my lover you know, whom I treasured far above all else,
some time ago, but I could not speak for seeing her here,
being in this hard time of hardness,
in our dark shaded room, but light.

Those eyes sunken in, those cheeks shrunken thin,
those lips thin from hunger,
those lips parted scarcely, moving, whispering, crying to me quietly,
saying,
“I dreamed about the child!”

.....

.....

She whom I once loved said to me:

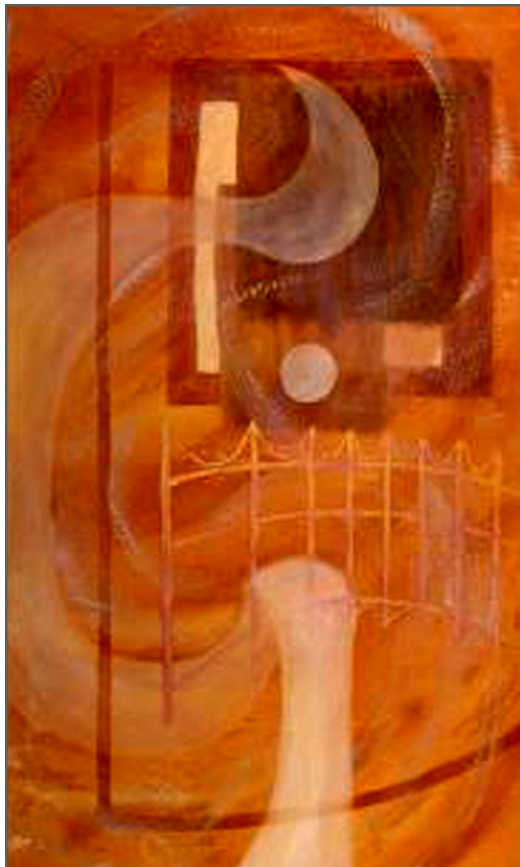
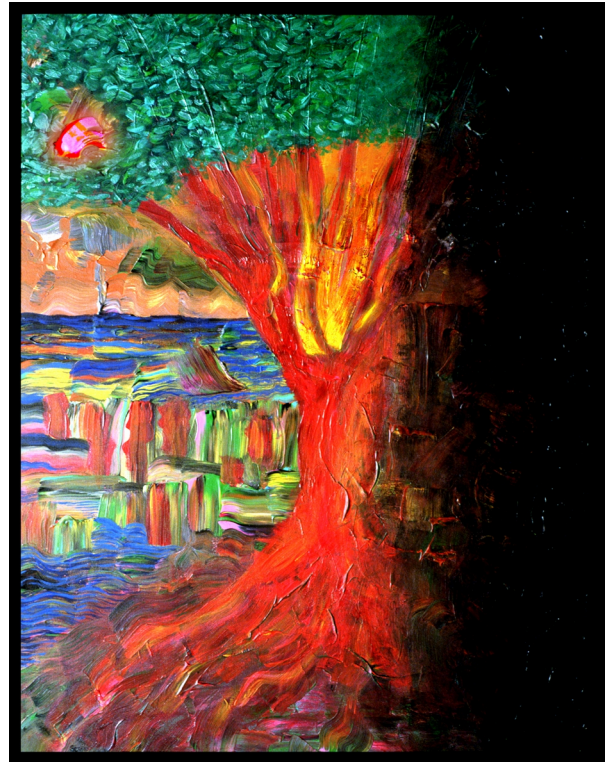
“I dreamed I flew away. There was a land somewhere.

And the sun and moon were reaching toward each other
and they were spinning spinning spinning spinning.

And there was a forest there.

And our child was there.

And there was a burst of flames.”



.....

I can't sleep now. I'm awake. She woke me.
I can't sleep now so what on Earth can I do?
If you get this letter will you tell me?
Are you well?

Heaven help me,
Here I stand on the front step of this old house,
looking out into that road you left on
praying to some god I don't know, that you, my child,
will come walking here,
around that corner over there and up this street,
right now and
come answer all my questions.

But I'm seeing now. I have to see it now to look for you,
I have to look and there it is, the road.
There is the road right there.
I'll wait till evening when it's cool at least,
but I'll go in now and make a pack
and go out back and cut a walking stick.

Will she go with me? I hope she will. I love her so.
We've helped each other so often.

How far can an old man and old woman get,
down this road around that bend?

A mile? Not even and even then how could we ever find you?
But I don't even care. I cannot care.

I cannot count the cost of everything and drink
the sleepy tea of fear
again, again.

.....

Here's what it is:

However long that I am alive,
I swear however long it is that I'm alive,
I will be alive.

.....

(End)

