

BEGINNINGS

(Free Enquiry) --James W. Moses.

It is a beautiful day out, and in, for that matter. Quite bright and yellow with a hint of mist, like early Saturday mornings when I was a kid who could go out with a clean T-shirt and jeans and running-shoes and run across the "Flats" getting wet up to my knees in the grass. (My summers did not start until I had my new jeans and running-shoes. Once I had those I had everything any boy could ever want and I did not give a hoot for anything but card-board boxes, the sun and shade, cicadas off somewhere up a tree complaining of the heat, and other kids' voices down the street where there was a big patch of bare ground under a tree.)

We would lay around on the grass in the sun and try to see the sky, amazed at its blueness and depth, and then we would start laughing for no reason at all, just laughing until our stomachs hurt.

We would lose ourselves for hours in some imaginative game whose greatest fascination was unreality and whose time-suspension would vary us down the long, sloping, sun-shafted afternoon until we could feel the heat leave the air and the purposefulness leave the day as parents and neighbours appeared one by one, making their slow, chating way home. There would be a supper in the cool airiness of the kitchen with the screen-door letting in a sweet, honey-sickle breeze and then, as the sun flattened itself on the horizon, it would be twilight.

Mon and Dad sitting on the front lawn in the half-dark. Half-formed shapes sprawling on the lawn; my sisters, kids from around, and me, inside getting a drink of water as fast as I can so I will not be left out. The voices softened by the thickening day. Crickets that we looked for, but could not find, making us wonder if they were real. After a while Dad getting up and going inside, then the porch-light coming on and making us all aware of the shadows that had formed unnoticed about us and the twilit restfulness being broken. Dad coming out with his hands in his pockets, rattling his keys. A momentary scuffle while everyone piles into the old Pontiac, kids from around and all, not knowing where we are going, just feeling that it is too much of an evening to spend sitting around. We drive slowly, and somebody chooses a direction. The Falls maybe, or down the canal, to watch ships from places that are only atlas-maps moving up and down in the yellow light of the locks. Voices, rumbling, engines, throbbing, boiling propellers, lounging sailors on rails, open hatch-ways, a port-hole with blue polka-dot curtains, the horn that never fails to catch you by surprise and the ceaseless delight of watching a monster lake-boat slip through the iron-gates of a lock, even though you have seen it a hundred times before. Then you are home, tired, but still able to feel the coolness of a friendly night breeze that makes you look up for a moment and see the tiny lived-in lights of a lonely airliner way up there between the Big Dipper and Sirius. You gawk in surprise, not because you are surprised, but because you want to. It is a night for gawking in surprise. Besides, if you stand and stare at an airliner whose noise, or voice, or sigh has just trickled down the sky to make the back of your head tingle with a strange longing, you know they will not make you go in and you will be able to hang onto whatever it is you have for a bit longer, even though you are not sure why you want to. You watch the plane until it slides under the white face of the moon that hangs small and luminous in the summer night and the want to hang on becomes stronger. You cannot sleep in a bed, in a house, not tonight and Mom and Dad do not argue. They are beginning to know you, so you slip into the sleeping-bag with your clothes on and lay with your hands behind your head and look up and you do not need a book to know what it is all about, because you are looking right back into eternity. A wondrous thought of a comet whose tail is supposed to be 9,000,000 miles long crosses your mind, but does not dwell. Tonight is not a night for figures. The win' sighs close in the hedge and you remember a piece of a hymn: "Through the rustling grass I hear Him pass, He speaks to me everywhere". And you close your eyes, and as you drift into sleep you wonder if that is not all you will ever really have to know. - J.W.M.

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