



Harvest moon

The maps of our childhood are the maps we most easily forget, or so it seems to me, looking back.

When I was a kid I ran through the gulleys and ravines of Lake Park as though it were my own back yard, which it very nearly was. My best friend D and I knew those woods like the backs of our hands and we spent almost every afternoon there after school. My home was five blocks from the park, D's was two. The amount of trouble that two young boys could get into in that park, without their parents ever knowing, was manifest.

A full moon in October, a Hunter's Moon, meant forts made from great mounds of fallen leaves, reinforced with strategically placed tree limbs. While our friends might be attending Hallow e'en parties to which we were not invited, we were busy devising new strategies for conquering the world, or defending our Emperor's hold upon it.

My father raised rose bushes, right at the front of our yard, hard up by the sidewalk. In autumn the leaves from the mountain ash in the yard, along with those from the silver maple on the verge, piled high behind the windbreak that the rose bushes provided. Behind that natural Maginot line we would build our forts, year after year. They were durable affairs, reinforced with fallen branches and cardboard boxes from Diet-Rite Cola or Friskies Cat Food or what have you. We would lay in repose with our clakety-clack toy rifles and Cub Scout canteens, ready for whichever invaders may try to lay waste to our hamlet.

One year D pilfered a pair of walkie-talkies from his older brother, Dan. We talked to each other in our fort as though we were but part of legion. The rest of the platoon were just around the corner, ready to aid us at a moment's notice. We were both pacifists, I'll have you know, but we were too young to realize that that meant we weren't supposed to wield weapons. You know how confused things can be at that age.

I was still trying to sort out my feelings about Alfreda LeiderbÄhm kissing me at Carrie's Hallow e'en party when D and I were torn apart by the exigencies of school and family and life. As an adult I have seen films about the Nazi era in France in which families are torn asunder and they never fail to make me think of how my leaving Mr. C's 8th grade classroom ultimately spelled the fatal turning point in D and my relationship. I went through high school in the next 3 years, while D slogged along, according to plan, and graduated high school about the same time I was dropping out of college.

Life was so simple back then. It may be a prosaic pronouncement, but it is also quite true that the world we face as 13 year old boys is nothing compared to what we will face the next time we have a chance to assess our self worth and place in the world, which may not come around until we're 21 or 35. My epiphany came at 13, when my father passed away. D's father took me under his wing and tried to fill a gaping hole in my life (something I didn't realize for years) while, simultaneously, D's parent's marriage was falling apart.

When D ran away from home, a couple of years later, I didn't really understand his complaint. He had two parents, after all, and they seemed nice enough to me. I lost a father to death and a mother to perpetual mourning, so what, exactly, was his beef?

Neglect, that was his beef. I only understand that now, with a wealth of history behind me.

Walk in the moonlight across empty roofs
Relish the moonlight's embrace
sing the song of the sun to his face

fall down the drainpipe to the road
trip on the gutter
do as you're told
Dance in the midnight, waltz in the dark
while others lay sleeping, serenade the park
have a mad affair, a tawdry rendezvous
long after twilight, a real lark
sing your song
mouth your words
pass silently abroad

We didn't ever have words like those. We wrote, though, thoughtless little boy larks of prose which we would submit to our teachers as joint works of fiction. In fifth grade that was enough to win over our teacher. She could care less that we collaborated on our work, that she got only half as much work as we were supposed to turn in "it was of such high quality, and consistently so" that she graded us as though we had turned in two full, long assignments.