

THE BENDING WORDS

Written by

Tom Portegys

EXT.

HOT SUMMER AFTERNOON OUTSIDE OF COFFEEHOUSE. PROPRIETOR IS RELAXING AND OBSERVES WOMAN APPROACHING FROM ROAD.

PROPRIETOR1

(Note: narrations are in italics)

To this day I haven't a full grasp on things. But I have some beliefs. One of which is where this story begins. Another is that I had a hand in how it ends. I could be wrong. I'm not sure what exists anymore, including me. One thing for sure: words have power. That's a nice platitude, isn't it? A warm fuzzy rah-rah sort of thing which is also to say it rings as hollow as an empty oil drum. But I'm talking about actual power, as in words that conjure and bring forth, if you follow certain theologies. For I am now sure that remnants of that power have been echoing down through the ages in various forms and guises.

It was summer and just a bit more humid than these parts are accustomed to. I do remember the sky was very high that day.

Traffic along the valley road a block away hummed lazily like torpid bees. The Traveler came from the direction of the road, around the corner of the take-out pizza place next door, bearing toward the few of us braving the heat under the shade of bleached green umbrellas in front of Starbucks.

I called her the Traveler because she had the look of one. Backpack, worn but sturdy shoes, brown hair pulled back from a tanned sweaty face, sun-squinty eyes surrounded by spiderweb lines, road dust clinging to her. That sort of thing. Maybe a little past forty, which was unusual for the drifter life. Humping around is more of a young person's game. In she went and out she came with a water, unsurprisingly. If she was going to throw five dollars at something it would probably be something more substantial than a coffee concoction. She ambled over.

TRAVELER

Hot.

PROPRIETOR

For walking especially, I expect.

TRAVELER

And I still have a ways to go to
the prison. It's up north, right?

PROPRIETOR

Yeah, but that's a few
miles.

TRAVELER

I'll find a way I'm sure. I don't
have ever have trouble wangling
transportation.

PROPRIETOR

Visiting or checking in?
(motioning for her to
sit, but she declines
with shake of head and
remains standing)

TRAVELER

(smiling)

Talking to someone about a
personal anomaly, I guess you
could say.

PROPRIETOR

That's an odd name for a
hemorrhoid.

TRAVELER

Cheeky bugger.

PROPRIETOR

Is that the cause?

TRAVELER

(suddenly in his face,
voice strangely
modulated)

You really want to know?

PROPRIETOR

Uh, OK.

*Then she got to her story. There's a queasy feeling when
someone you don't know goes on a mind-bending conversation.
After all, she's got the high ground. Hah, just caught
that: mind-bending. Not funny in the least, as you will
see. But you can't always curtail someone from telling*

their story based on a suspicion that grew with each word. Like the proverbial frog in water that slowly comes to boil, by the time you know what's going on it is too late.

She was indeed traveling, and had been doing so for a very long time. Actually, surprisingly long. Could have been decades. Mostly on foot, or bus, or hitching rides despite the present-day frowning upon the latter. For me, twisted or atonal things get staked in the cerebral cortex.

And this was one of them, like when my dad scooped up a bunch of wasps in his cap and plopped it back on his head to show us how he "wasn't afraid of 'em".

When she was a young teen, maybe thirteen or so, she had an arm injury playing sports and her mother took her to the doctor. It wasn't even that serious, a mildly hyperextended elbow. So she's sitting there on the examining table with her mother nearby and as the doctor is leaving the room he says something about a hole in her chest. That's it. Said it and left. Didn't even look at her when he said it. At the time, she didn't think anything of it either. Apparently it wasn't a great matter to the doctor. When she got home a quick check of course revealed no hole.

Life proceeded as it will. Days, weeks, years. Those few little words must have been drifting down and down into the dark depths where memories die. But these words didn't die. They urped up bubbles now and again into consciousness. How does a 'meh' become a concern become a worry become an obsession? For that is what transpired. But it took years to gestate.

By her later teens, the hole had become a lodestar, demanding answers, and soon putting her on a quest for them.

What was this hole? What is its significance? Since no physical hole exists, is there some spiritual or supernatural meaning? Her mother was no help, having graduated from cluelessness to avoidance to futile pleadings to desist. They had moved away and she didn't remember who the doctor was nor how to find him. She saw her mother's recalcitrance as a form of betrayal, a deep cut that only a parent can inflict. And so, when she reached late teens, she began a quest to find the doctor or to discover the meaning of what he had said.

(My brother Rhys unobtrusively joins us at the table. I nod to him as he quietly motions us to carry on.)

Early on, there were seemingly solid leads, medical offices located in likely locales, registers of physicians, people who thought they could remember someone of the doctor's general description. It didn't help that he was the essence of a bland-looking, middle-aged, gray-haired male. In time, the leads became flimsier until now they were almost whimsical. After so many years, he might now be retired and living in Arizona for all she knew. And so she would gravitate here and there around the country on no more than a few words from a well-meaning person on the other end of a cold call for information.

Now in particular she was headed to the prison some miles north to pry for information.

The possible symbolism of a hole in the chest was not lost on her. Some sort of figurative stigmata? A Cain-like marking of a blighted destiny? Yet, as with the location of the doctor, nothing emerged as a result of diligent research and pursuit of expert opinion. I'm sure the gamut of her speculations could not have been accurately reflected in her recitation to my brother and me. And indeed it was a recitation, smooth and flowing and mesmerizing. Of course, that could be put down to repetition.

The story struck me as either a joke or madness. Yet here was its author, affable and both feet on the ground, standing with the sun behind her head granting her a nimbus of authority. Oddly, as I recall, for however long she spoke, the sun appeared not to move from behind her head. Well, time does play tricks when there's a worthy story in the telling. And then she bid us goodbye and was on her way north to the prison where someone might know something about the mysterious cavity in her chest.

INT.

BOWLING ALLEY IN TOWN.

PROPRIETOR

A day later I had just demolished Emil at our weekly bowling rendezvous. Mostly due to him being well off his game. He slumped on the plastic bench after a particularly deflating 7-10 split, eyes pensively wandering on the ceiling as I tallied up.

EMIL

(In a musing tone.)

So have you run across a copy of the Necronomicon yet? I'd make you a fair offer.

PROPRIETOR

The fabled Necronomicon is a grimoire of dark magic, and by fabled I mean pure fiction. I have a modest book restoral business. It doesn't make much money but makes up for it in life satisfaction by feeding my fascination with obscure literature.

No but I am well-stocked with Lovecraft.

EMIL

Emil is a freelance reporter for the local newspaper.

I'm only asking for the public good. Seems our fair town might be displaced as safest place to live in the state with that brutal murder at the prison. A little resurrection spell and "poof", back to zero murders since last Tuesday!

PROPRIETOR

(In a decidedly nonmusing tone.)

What did you say? Murder at the prison? Who?

EMIL

Ha! So current events do interest you! A prisoner killed a woman visitor just yesterday and then broke out. He broke her neck with his bare hands right in the visiting area. Witnesses say the guy was insanely strong and fast. Actually broke a security door right off the hinges! Of course the hinges in that old place must have been forged by 19th century blacksmiths. And once he reaches the forest outside, he vaporizes. I'm about to wangle a side bar story that everyone has overlooked. See I happen to know that the perp was the son of Madame

Blavatsky, our very own channel to the stars.

PROPRIETOR

I'm pretty sure I talked to the victim yesterday. She's was heading to the prison to talk to an inmate

I decided to overlook the Madame Blavatsky crack. Since she died in the 19th century and all. I knew who he was really talking about.

EMIL

Oh Lawdy that is juicy! Hey are you doing anything right now?
I was heading to the prison this afternoon to pump the staff, but I think I'll bump that up on the agenda.

PROPRIETOR Absolutely!

EXT.

OUTSIDE BOWLING ALLEY, ON WAY TO PRISON.

We left to the alley by the side door and circled around to the parking lot in back. I didn't have my car as the place was just down the hill from my apartment. We piled into Emil's ageless Miata and pulled out on to the main drag through town heading north toward the prison. I got further filled in on the way. It was the Traveler. At the edge of town he swung up Cherry Road heading east, away from the prison.

PROPRIETOR

Uh, Emil?

EMIL

I think we need to check in with the old lady first. See how she's doing. She lives just up at the top of the hill.

PROPRIETOR *That's how*

I met "Madame Blavatsky".

EXT.

MADAME BLOTSKY'S FRONT DOOR.

M. BLOTSKY

You stop calling me that! I am not Blavatsky! Read sign idiot!

PROPRIETOR

An impressive number of reddened facial wrinkles upturned at Emil, the very essence of bovine bemusement. Something he's so good at.

The name on the sign by the end of the driveway said Madame Blotsky, and advertised Tarot card readings. Emil told me she's Roma, but wants to be called a Gypsy. He said that she thinks, probably rightly so, that people think Roma is a kind of tomato, and "Nobody come to get cards read by no tomato!"

M. BLOTSKY

(She then turns to me.

Her eyes widen in shock, then squint, peering deeply.)

Where is rest of you? You leave back at house?

PROPRIETOR

Not exactly an easy question to answer. So I didn't.

INT.

PRISON. THE SUN IS A HOT HAZY SMEAR ABOVE THE PRISON. A CLACKING AIR CONDITIONER JUTS OUT OF THE WARDEN'S SECOND FLOOR CORNER OFFICE WITHIN THE SQUAT LIMESTONE COUNTENANCE OF THE PRISON. INSIDE, BEHIND A MODEST WOODEN DESK AMID AN OFFICE APPOINTED WITH INSTITUTIONAL GREEN CARPET AND OAK VENEER PANELING, THE WARDEN BIDS HIS KNOCKING VISITOR TO ENTER.

WARDEN

(Locking eyes on the proffered paper cup of coffee in the hand of the advancing correctional guard.)

Gimme.

GUARD You're welcome.

WARDEN

Hot hot! No news yet from the search. Weird how Lenny could just vanish like that. I guess we can lift the lockdown now, don't you agree?

GUARD

(Nodding.)

Right, I guess the horse is long gone from the barn.

WARDEN

You still look a little out of it. Seeing that must have really been a shock.

GUARD

(Gets up from sitting in the guest chair and goes to the window.)

I'm still trying to wrap my head around it. Mr. Minimum security small-time grifter Lenny Blotsky actually killed someone right in the visitor area. And I had a front row seat. You and I and the cops have been over the security camera footage, but I can tell you that doesn't do it justice!

WARDEN

But the camera does show a pudgy middle-age guy having a lovely little chat with one of his schmucks about cosmic forces, dream-time totem animals or whatever dippty-do du jour, then suddenly going ape-shit, snapping the woman's neck, darting up like the Flash, and ramming that heavy door down like it was a flimsy screen door.

She said something to him just before he went off, but nobody caught what it was, right?

GUARD

(Sitting down again.)

By the time I got outside, he was just disappearing into the trees. No one saw him get over the fence.

WARDEN

I'll be glad when this dies down,
I can tell you. No one like attention in
the correctional industry. Bad for
business. Most of the media had its
blood meal yesterday, but there's still
some straggler coming this afternoon
from the local paper.

GUARD

(Glancing at clock on desk.)
I better be getting back to our
distinguished clientele.

WARDEN

OK, thanks for the coffee. Just wanted
to see if anything crystallized in that
dome of yours since yesterday.

GUARD

(Popping his head back in as he
is closing the
door.)

She's still chilling down in the
morgue?

WARDEN

Yep. She is awaiting the deputy coroner
to come pick her up. No ID. Signed in as
'Calpurnia Caulfield', which didn't
check out with the cops.

You know there's another thing that
really weirds me out. Not just the
broken neck but that crater in her
chest. How did that happen?

(The phone rings. The guard
lingers hoping to catch some
overheard news. The warden
answers and hooks a finger at
him.)

The reporter is here with a couple of
other people. One of them is Lenny's
mother for shit sake. I'm assigning them
to you since you're the expert. Just
give them the tour and herd them out of
here before five, OK?

GUARD

(Groans ruefully.) INT.

PRISON ARRIVAL OF PROPRIETOR, EMIL, AND M. BLOTSKY.

PROPRIETOR

Surprisingly, Madame Blotsky did not know about her son's escape after the murder of the woman, who must have fallen for one of Lenny's scams that he could help her on her quest. The old lady insisted on coming, but when they started out became grimly quiet, and the two men did not engage her on the trip to the prison.

Some things just scream functional and I can relate. The prison for example. I've been by the nondescript entrance many times. Turns out the inside is also nondescript. So there we were parking the Miata and extricating a black-clad living bag of sticks from behind the seats. Then we walked inside and signed in, Emil presenting a folded up printed email as a credential, and waited in plastic chairs for our guide. I glance surreptitiously at Madame Blotsky from time to time. She continued to be understandably subdued considering the situation. Her mouth was working away mumbling something I couldn't catch.

After a requisite period of sensory deprivation, our guide cometh. He matched the bland décor perfectly. Seemed a bit put out though. Not solicitous but kid gloves with Madame so obviously he knows who she is. Bears up with Emil's yakking. Ignores me.

The visitor's room where the murder happened has nothing to add, but just being there had some sort of impact I think for all of us. The broken down door was back up and welded on its hinges. The guard was adamant about the door being sound before being broken down by Lenny. It looked OK to me. Then we got to see it being busted off its hinges by a human blur on the video recording right after a winsomely smiling Lenny, who must have thought he had one on the hook, did a presto-chango into a snarling werewolf and did the deed. I couldn't look at that part. I just strained to listen to the muted conversation over and over between Lenny and the woman with whom I had had a very nice if slightly disturbing conversation the day before. Because of a creeping things-ain't-right feeling I almost convinced myself that the video fluttered a bit as in a bad horror movie just before Lenny went bonkers, but neither I nor anyone else was sure.

INT.

PRISON MORGUE

PROPRIETOR

Then it was time to tramp down to the prison morgue to see the body. Oh joy. Was this even legal? Emil however never wavered.

The truth is out there and must be rooted out and put before the rabble to gorge on. A crude concrete archway led down to the morgue. I was last going down single file. I noticed Madame Blotsky pulling something out from a pocket and holding it close in front of her.

The overhead lights were on as we entered a small sparse room, the guard shutting the door behind us. I expected to see a wall of stainless-steel drawers but instead the entire room was refrigerated to the point of being able to see our breath. There was a metal table in the middle of the room with a sheet covering the body. Nobody spoke as we gathered aside the table, two to each side. I was shaking a bit, and not just from the cold. Emil's eyes had gone wide and his lips ceased moving. Madame Blotsky's lips had resumed mumbling at a louder volume, hopefully mystical abjurations at this point.

The guard slid the sheet down to the top of her breasts. Her broken neck wasn't evident at all. I'm not an expert on death, but she actually just looked asleep. But there was the hole, right below her left collarbone, a cavity about one or two inches deep, just a smooth pink flesh indentation. I felt the world slipping a little sideways when I saw it. It was actually there. Emil got close and gawked at it for about ten seconds, then he raised his head quickly and said with a hitch in his voice that there was something glowing faintly in there!

It was the guard who switched off the lights without warning us, but in any case we could not have been prepared for what came next. In our combined breath vapor there was indeed a faint beam emanating upward from the cavity. Emil turned his head up immediately but for some reason I turned to Madame Blotsky thinking that if there was mumbo-jumbo it would be her bailiwick. The rest of me got ready to run for the door. She had also turned her face to the ceiling but now there was a blackness boiling out of her eyes, blacker than the room's darkness, that flowed down and over the body before dissipating in the air like a negative version of our breath. Then there was a loud crash.

Suddenly the lights were back on. Emil was lying against a wall, clutching his eyes. The guard was ordering us out, dragging Emil to his feet and pushing him through the door and up the stairs. We stumbled back to the waiting room. The guard, now with a worried look on his face wanted us gone right now. Madame Blotsky and I took Emil's elbows and helped him out and into the Miata.

There he sat white faced and unresponsive to my "you OKs?" After ten minutes I decided to drive back to town.

EXT.

ON WAY BACK TO TOWN

(After fifteen minutes on the road, Emil bellows.)

EMIL

They were moving! Words were moving on the ceiling!

PROPRIETOR

(Almost runs off the road. Pulls over and looks over at Emil. That's when Madame Blotsky bleats from behind him.)

M. BLOTSKY

My poor boy! My poor poor boy!

EXT.

AT EDGE OF HEAVILY FORESTED AREA NEAR PRISON WHERE LENNY WAS LAST SEEN.

RHYS

My name is Rhys. I showed up at the coffeehouse table and listened to the tale of the traveling woman while my brother sipped his coffee and nodded patronizingly. After the transformation and escape of Lenny Blotsky, and after I learned about the events in the prison morgue, I decided that it was vital to make an effort to find Lenny. It was like a compulsion. Police searches, dogs and all, had come up empty.

My brother wanted to go with me, saying that it was dangerous to go alone into the land around the prison, which is heavily forested and potted with bogs festooned with brambles. I, however, insisted on going alone. He was looking pale and tired. The past day had taken a toll on him. He gave me a ride to the point I chose to start from, about a quarter of a mile from the prison. I told him to go get Emil and hit up the bowling alley. I looked at him squarely and told him it was important, although I wasn't sure why.

An overnight rain was steaming up in the intensifying heat of morning. Sweat was soon soaking my shirt and running in rills

down the sides of my face as I headed up a steep rocky incline and plunged into the tree cover.

Once in the woods, I swiftly headed off on a route that I was increasingly confident would cross Lenny's path. I could hear my brother's car driving away behind me, and was glad that he wouldn't be witnessing much less interfering with what might later take place.

Lenny's track was a black shimmering thread with a metallic aroma, likely fading after two days. I never questioned why I was able to see it. It ran along the ground in a direction that I reckoned it might. I set out following it like a bloodhound. Once I slipped and stepped on the thread, and a howling agony rang out as though a hammer were striking an anvil in my mind. The creature must be mad if this is his condition. Fear then spurred me onward faster, despite fatigue and the sharp barbs of the undergrowth.

I came upon him crouching behind a tree at the top of a ridge overlooking his mother's house. I approached cautiously, listening to him mewling softly. Shirtless, he had bitten himself repeatedly and blood in various stages of coagulation stained his torso, limbs and mouth. To distract from the deeper pain within him? Possibly, but he had also traced out odd markings on his skin in blood whose meanings I did not understand.

I paused speechlessly, quite aware that he was aware of me. I was sure he had been waiting in this very spot for two days, and that I was expected. Slyly and slowly his head swiveled to face me. It was then that I became aware of myself juxtaposed before him. I was a child in the presence of a being welling up from unfathomable depths of time. A being not whole, and horribly unstable.

His leap was mercurial and his grip on my arm was iron. He did not speak and I was sure that nothing I could say would have deterred him. We both took the slope toward the house in bounds, as I seemingly became imbued with some of his gargantuan strength. As though we were expected, the door of the house opened as we approached, Madame Blotsky appearing in the dim light within. I could not see her face, but her arms were outstretched and trembling.

INT.

BOWLING ALLEY IN TOWN.

PROPRIETOR

I read your article. Those darn electrical glitches. Are you sure you are OK?

Emil and I had made it to the seventh frame. Many beers had been imbibed. Laci, vacuous goddess of the midday shift, continued to bring bottles and take away the empties.

EMIL

I'm OK enough after tripping on a wire and hitting my head on the wall after the power went out.

PROPRIETOR

(Speaking softly.)

Emil, there was no power outage and no wire on the floor.

EMIL

(Ignoring comment.)

For all I know I might still be concussed! Do my eyes look weird?

PROPRIETOR

(Emil Leans into face, beer breath billowing around his head, eyes goggling to cartoon proportions. Pulls back.)

They look like perfectly drunken eyeballs. Soooo, I guess that's your go-to for freaking out.

EMIL

(Applying balled fists to restore his eyes to their sockets.)

Concussions are nothing to sneeze at my friend.

PROPRIETOR

What about Madame Blotsky? She seemed pretty distraught.

EMIL

Such a shock! Just between you and me, I do have a soft spot for the old witch. That's why I snuck a discreet call out

for her fortunetelling business into the article.

PROPRIETOR

Of course you did. Putting a link to her web page into an article about her son becoming a murderous monster was very tactful. And the limited-time promo-code of "Lenny" was a nice touch. Did you even talk to her about that?

EMIL

She waved her OK from her doorway when we dropped her off.

PROPRIETOR

I think she was shaking her fist, Emil. Anyway, I'm sure Lenny would approve. At least the Dr. Jekyll version of him. He is all about banking some coin.

I was pretty wasted, and not just on the beer. Literally wasted. It was my turn to roll, which resulted in a dreaded 7-10 split.

When the ball returned I made to grab it but my fingers just slipped right through the surface into the ball a half inch or so.

Hey Emil, check this out.

(The fingertips of both hands are invisible. The ball had become semisolid somehow.)

EMIL

(Sits there, processing.
Laci makes an appearance,
rolls her eyes and wanders away.
Seconds ticked by. Finally offers advice)

If you can pick it up just roll with both hands. Nobody is looking.

PROPRIETOR

So that's what I did, rolling it like a five-year-old. And miraculously picked up the split. There was nothing wrong with the ball.

I stood looking down the length of the alley as the pins reset.

Emil, I have to tell you something. I have to go now.

EMIL

I somehow I knew you were going to say that. Where are you going?

PROPRIETOR

No where and no when. I seem to be fading away. But don't worry, I'm sure Rhys will want to bowl with you. He's more like me than you know. Especially after I'm gone. I'm going to miss you Emil.

EMIL

(Eyes beginning to glitter.)

I won't forget you buddy.

PROPRIETOR

I'm sorry Emil, but you already are.

The last thing I saw was an inebriated Emil sitting at the scoring desk, forehead knitted with concentration, fighting against it.

EMIL

(Sometime later, Emil notices drops of water on the scoresheet, which now recorded a single game.)

(Mumbling to self) Cold beers really sweat in this humidity.

INT.

PRISON MORGUE

GUARD

How is our sleeping beauty today?

TRAVELER

(Sitting up on table.) Hungry!

GUARD

(Gapes and freezes. The only sounds in the room are coming

from a wasp nest on the ceiling.)

TRAVELER

(Pointing at nest.)

Sorry about that. I must have been dreaming.

(Her sheet falls away as she swivels off of the table, nearly pitching forward into the wall.)

Look, no hole!

GUARD

(Finally unfreezing.)

This can't be. It's not happening.

TRAVELER

Please go get my clothes and some food. I've got to find that old woman who was here yesterday. Look at me. OK? And don't tell anyone.

GUARD

(Falls to his knees and raising his arms, a rapt expression on his face.)

TRAVELER

Well that is interesting. And flattering. But no. Get up and don't do that again. Food and clothes, quick and on the sly.

GUARD

(Her clothes had been taken as police evidence, but the guard manages to find a spare uniform and shoes.

Half a dozen toaster waffles are heated up in the duty room microwave while fending off the inevitable lame jokes.

He even took a bite from one on the way out the door to allay suspicion.

Within twenty minutes, the fortuitously chosen guard uniform proved its worth as they left the prison via the guard entrance carrying purloined prison van keys.)

EXT.

TRAVELER AND GUARD EN ROUTE TO MADAME BLOTSKY'S HOUSE.

GUARD

(Lets her drive, providing directions on the way. He sits facing her with a mixture of fear and adoration on his face.)

What did you say to Lenny?

TRAVELER

I think it was something like, 'How's the food here?'. The interview was a dead end. I wasn't about to hawk 'indestructible' food storage containers for him. And of course he had no leads to my elusive Doctor. God what was I thinking all these years?

I'll tell you what though. I felt something immense coiling around Lenny, something dark and sleeping. I could feel it stirring while I spoke to him. But I could not focus on it. It was like nothing and everything at the same time.

Suddenly it spasmed, and Lenny went off, just like that. I don't remember much except for his face changing and a blur coming at me.

The next thing I was aware of was that woman, his mother, down there in the morgue. I heard her speaking. Felt her. She's like Lenny, she has the same entity around her, but she has it better under control.

She somehow brought me back from wherever I was. It was that black stuff she spread over me, it comes from whatever Lenny and she are hooked into. I took it up like a sponge and used it to reconstruct myself. And I'm OK now. After Lenny killed me, that hole in my chest really finally appeared, the one that people thought I was crazy about, but now it's gone. And yet whatever was in that hole is still with me. I can feel it. And so can you I guess, right?

GUARD

(Nods. As they approached on a gravel road through a remote wooded area, a queasy miasma overcomes the guard. He suddenly blurts out.)

Let me out here! Let me out! The house is just a little way ahead.

TRAVELER

(Watches the guard running back down the road in the rear-view mirror as she pulls away, missing Rhys face-planting on the windshield.

He is OK. Just had the wind knocked out of him. She helps him get to his feet. When their eyes meet there is instant recognition for both of them.)

RHYS

It got too crazy back there, I had to get out! It was like everything was breaking up and rearranging, including me! And I'm not talking about an earthquake or a storm. I was getting caught up in it, losing myself. It's Lenny, he's doing it.

She's keeping it under control somehow. She must be very strong. But I don't think for long. I tried to talk to her but she mostly brushed me off, saying how she needed you! Something about you having the 'bending words' that caused

Lenny to be this way but could also help Lenny from coming apart.

You know what I'm talking about, don't you? About the 'bending words'?

TRAVELER

(Speaking calmly) My world has been cracking apart for most of my life and only now has that burden lifted off of me. I should be terrified to go on, but I'm not.

RHYS

(Eyes wide, blurts out) You *made* me didn't you? Spoke me into being back at the coffee shop. And nobody blinked an eye, including me.

TRAVELER

I didn't know until now how things like that could happen around me. Somehow just from talking about random stuff. It must be like some kind of infection. I got it from a doctor when I was a kid when he made some comment to me about the hole in me. Who knows what I've done since then.

RHYS

Apparently not me, although I think Lenny thought I had what you have when I tracked him down.

He immediately grabbed me and hauled me into the house. He must be aware that he needs someone like you.

TRAVELER

(A look of understanding coming across her face.)

I think when I spoke to Lenny at the prison it was like jabbing a sword into a sleeping dragon. Something dangerous and ancient woke up and lashed out.

I have to go there Rhys. Right now before it's too late. Even here I can feel the chaos building. Take the van.

(Rhys hesitates, then hugs her tightly. He slides behind the wheel and backs into the reverse direction, away from the house. Their eyes meet one more time.)

Rhys, I don't know how, but you are growing more real by the minute. You will soon be as real as me or anyone. I can see that now. Don't forget that. If I've learned anything, it's that reality isn't cast in stone, and never has been.

INT.

MADAME BLOTSKY'S HOUSE.

TRAVELER

(It is mere steps to the house, which waits just beyond the next bend in the road at the top of a rise. She approaches the open door and enters. There was the sound of a TV nearby.

She follows the sound into the kitchen, where Lenny sits shirtless eating soup and intently watching a cartoon. His mother is bending over the stove and speaks when she enters the room without turning toward her.)

M. BLOTSKY

He is calm now. Just for now. You get ready. You fix Lenny. You fix now or next time, 'boom' we all go back into darkness. Then no people, no stars, no nothing.

TRAVELER

(Hearing this, she slides into a chair opposite Lenny, whose eyes are locked on the

TV as Wile E. Coyote sends the Road Runner off a cliff to his demise. Seeing that, her lips curl into a small smile. Then she clicks off the TV and reaches for his arm.

Lenny stares down into his empty bowl. Black tears are filling his eyes and dripping into the bowl.

As she touches him, the floor, walls, ceiling and sky are snatched away like sheets of crumpled paper.

In an instant, the Void is born again.

And the Word faces the Void.

She feels herself flung back and away, expecting to meld into nothingness, but then a tether snaps taut, and as she comes tumbling around she sees that it binds her to the Word, now off in the distance.

She and it are bound. The Traveler realizes that everything everywhere has fallen into an inchoate oblivion.

Then, like a potter grasping clay, the Word speaks into the Void, and order comes forth from chaos.)

EXT.

ON ROAD OUTSIDE OF TOWN.

TRAVELER

(The Traveler becomes aware of her feet crunching in the gravel on the side of the road in the glare of a hot

afternoon. Memory trails in her wake and gradually catches up when she sees a few buildings ahead that she knows are the outcroppings of a town.

Rhys is sitting there in front of the coffeehouse, sipping coffee with Emil. She quickly ducks back around a corner as not to be seen.

There is no brother there, nor would there ever be one in the new world that is much like the old one, yet different.

And with a few contributions of her own.)

I do think it's time to go home.

Wherever that is.

INT.

LENNY BLOTSKY'S BUSINESS WAREHOUSE LENNY

BLOTSKY

(Lenny's eyes roam here and there over stacks of boxes labeled "Blotskyware".)

PROPRIETOR

Some days after the surprising 'not guilty' verdict for his latest legal misadventure, Lenny's fortunes took a turn for the better. His cadre of sales people are out daily scouring the towns nearby, peddling his "indestructible" food storage containers. Lenny, always the entrepreneur, has unknowingly had a small role in Genesis.

Most weeks, he makes time to have supper with Madame Blotsky, at her insistence. Before they eat, he often watches cartoons, chuckling at the myriad ways the Coyote's plans are foiled by the Road Runner.

She talks to him about a certain family legacy while they eat, and sometimes he even listens to her.